AS LOUD AS POSSIBLE

ISSUE ONE • 2010

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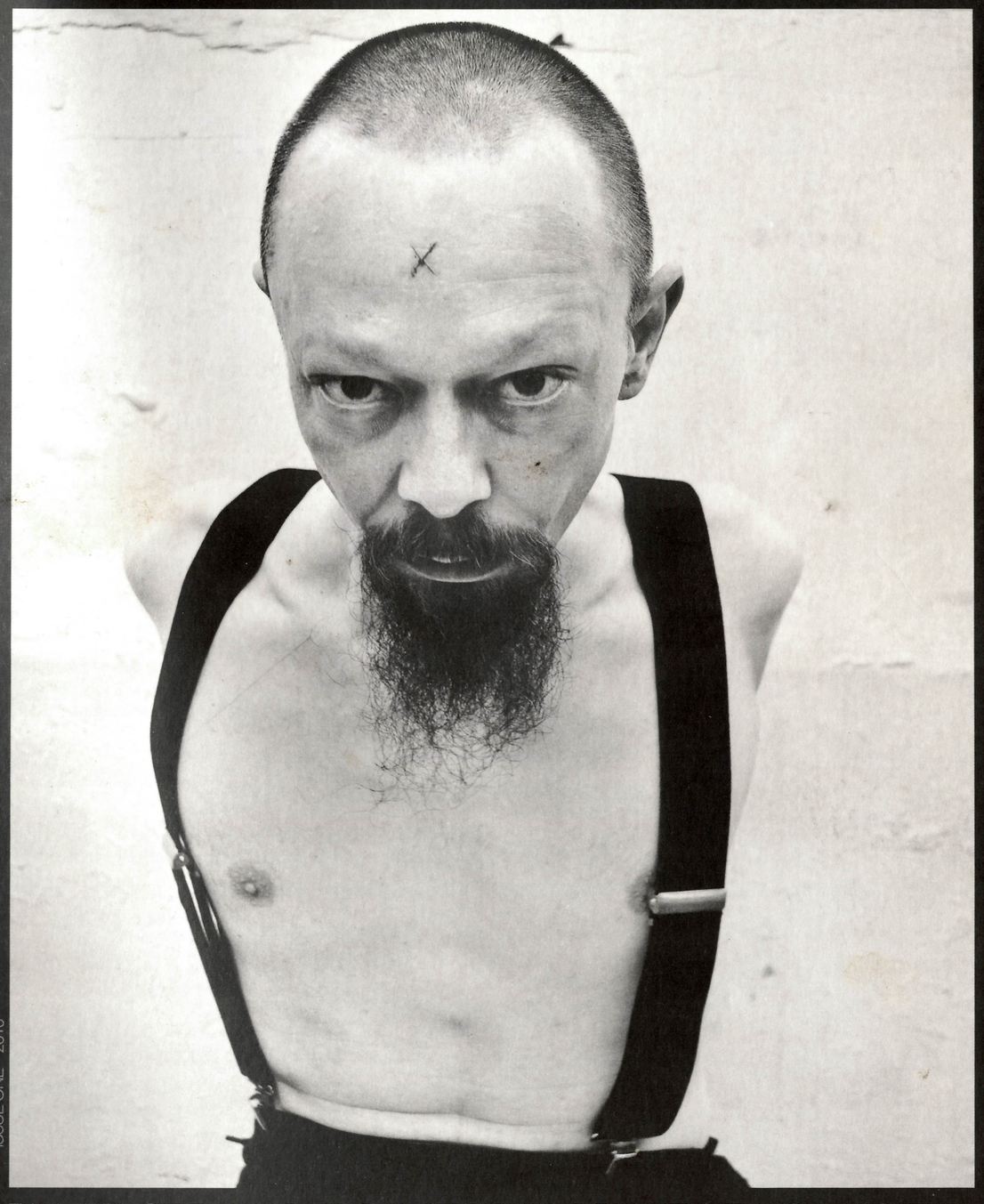
AS LOUD AS POSSIBLE

THE NOISE CULTURE MAGAZINE



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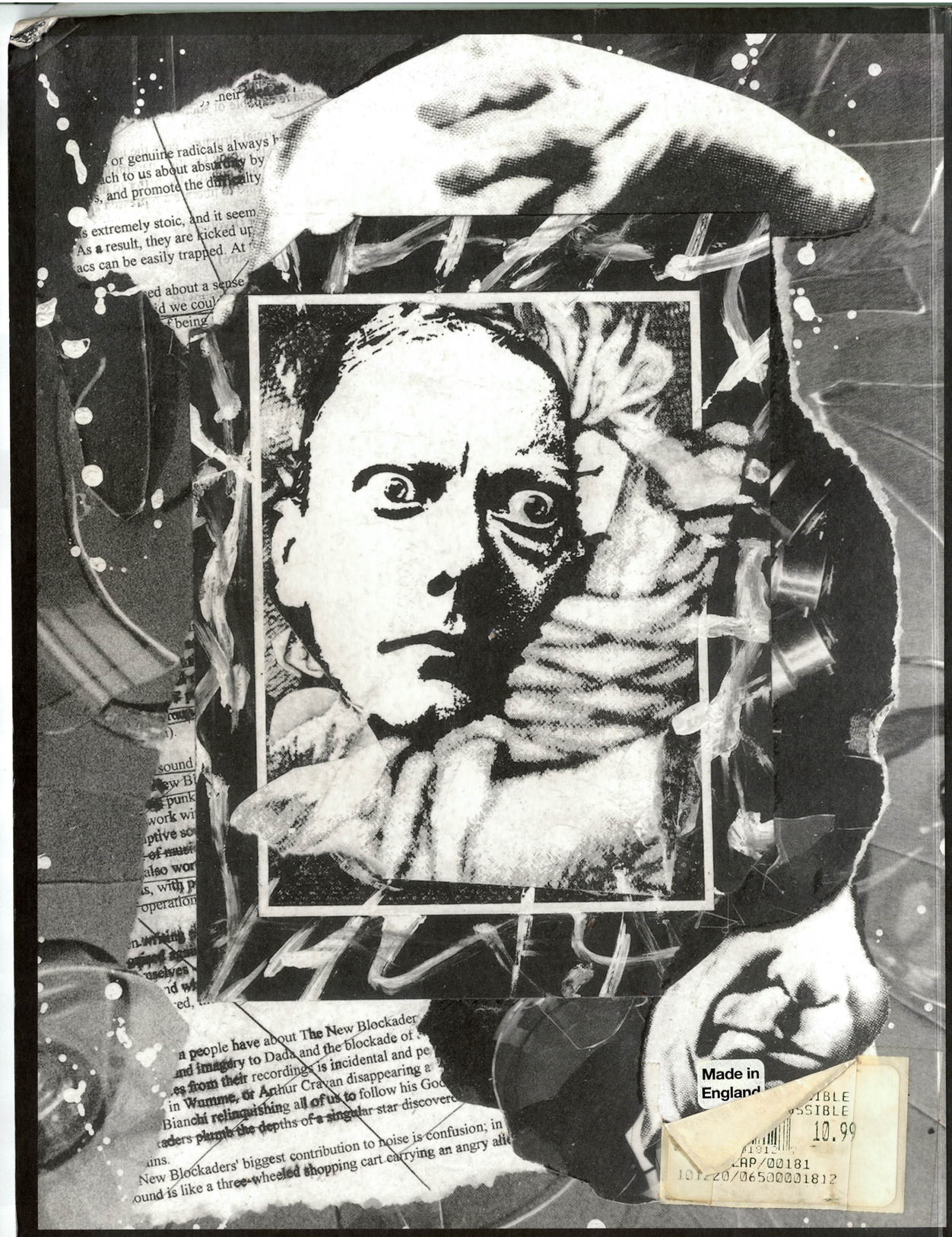

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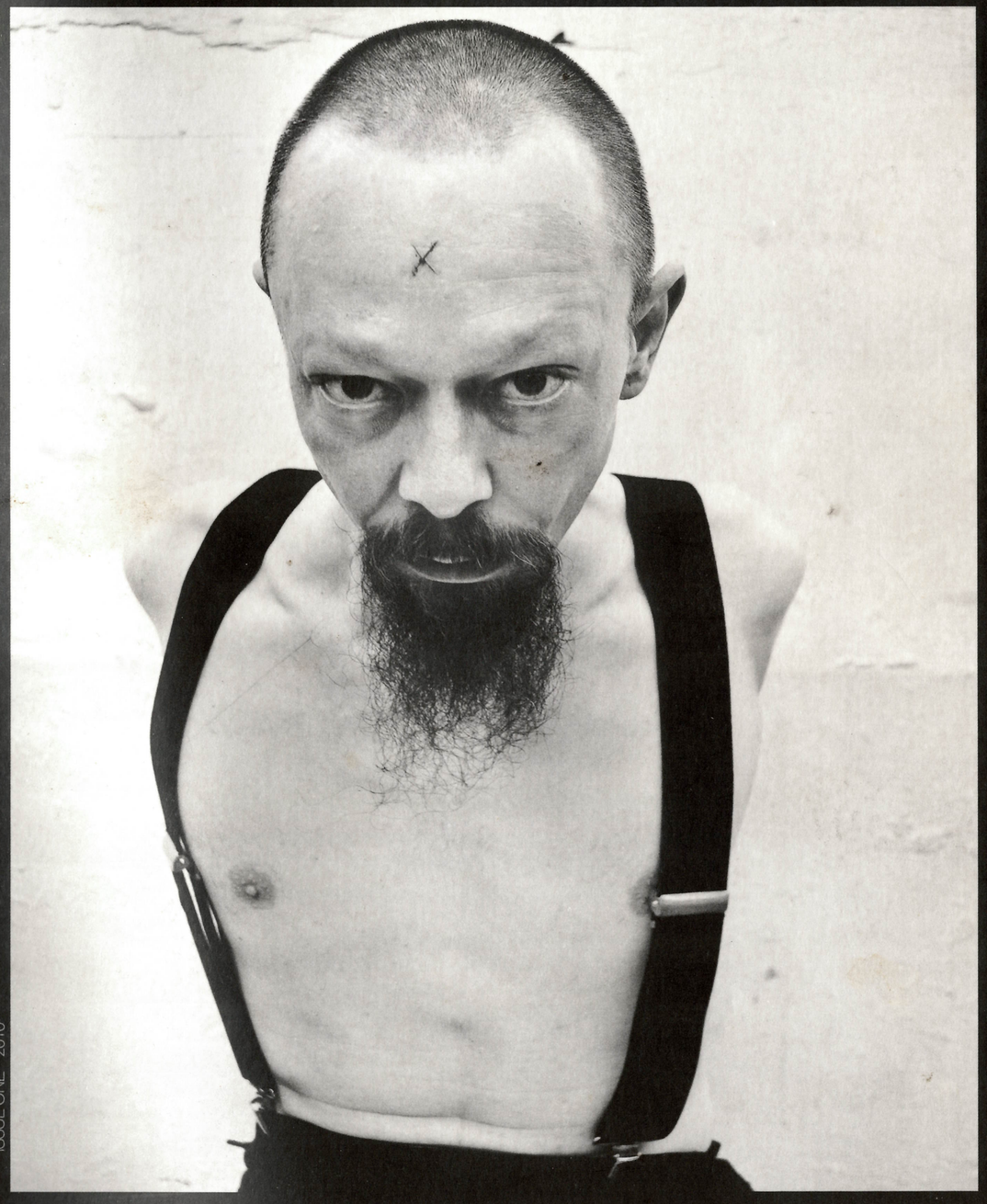

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AS LOUD AS POSSIBLE

Issue One • Fall 2010

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Editorial

BY CHRIS SIENKO

Welcome to the first issue of As Loud As Possible.

We created this magazine to solve a problem: to offer a contrast to the fumbling coverage of noise and experimental music found in most glossy music magazines. While there's a fair amount of lip service given to 'noise' and its various sub-genres in the popular press, the reporters, though earnest in their desire to explain what's happening to their ears, seldom have a deep or wide background in noise listening or the ability to contextualize one record in relation to another. To them, all Merzbow records sound more or less the same and are for the same use, or worse, they can hear no differentiation between a Merzbow, a John Wiese, a Macronympha, or a Sudden Infant. True, everyone starts at the same place, but so many attempts at noise reviewing are endless reinventions of the wheel, reducible to a one-line summary: "This record would be great to break a lease," or "play this if you want your roommate to run away screaming."

It's true that noise and other forms of avant garde sound have an element of no-nonsense confrontation to them, but reducing a project that has spent decades refining a sound and concept to nothing more than a one-dimensional audio 'fuck you' to the neighbors is ridiculous. Whether the slow, heavy wheels of history will crush or spare the efforts of people who have furthered the cause of the Great Din, to those of us who are here now, Noise Culture (as we're calling it on the cover) is really exciting and worthy of detailed investigation. There are differences between good and bad noise, and there are ways to explain this in print.

As Loud As Possible covers experimental audio from the mid-'70s to the present, with at least one career-spanning article per issue. The liberation of writing ALAP is knowing that we're able to think on a grand scale. We get to speculate, to let our minds wander, to meander through our record collections and see which projects and records still stand out, to see which newcomers are breaking ahead of the pack and trying new things, and, best of all, to chase a story to its full and final conclusion.

ALAP champions underdogs, master craftsmen, brilliant one-offs, and dedicated recluses. We search for people who left noise for The Great Day-Job In The Sky, asking questions to people who haven't thought about their own work in years. Even if it's not important to them anymore, it's important to us (and you, we hope). At a time when forward progress is everything and self-reflection rare, ALAP will do its part to gather up and save small pails of history against the flood of information that deluges us every day.

The decision to focus significant energy on projects that started (and even ended) in the '80s or early '90s is deliberate. Bluntly, the mid-'90s exerted a gravitational pull that redirected the course of harsh noise which continues to this day. Japanese artists refined two things during this time: spasticity in noise, and the stereotypical roar that's so loud, it's still. At the same time, the Americans and Italians (among others) transformed filthy tape techniques and crude production into holy relics of a new religion. These days, you'd have to travel to mud huts or snow caves to find sonic prestidigitators that aren't influenced by '90s noise tape culture or Alchemy Records, or at least influenced by someone who was influenced by it. As a result, some very good ideas are being lost because few can see the forest for the shaker-box-connected-to-six-pedals.

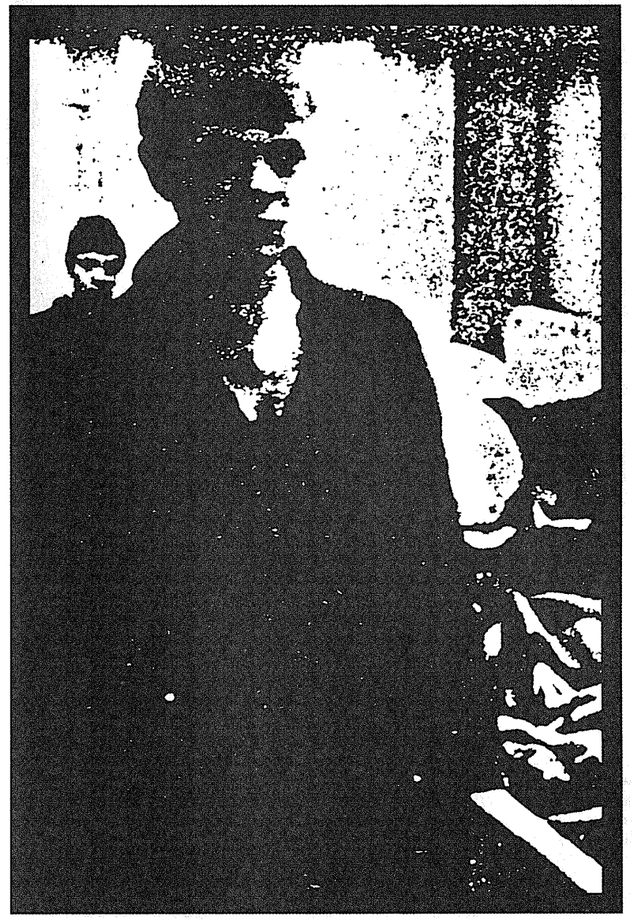
It's not just about equipment — new technology does, of course, make once-difficult effects and atmospheres easier to create, a paradoxical handicap to originality that seems to make little sense — there's also the risk of stagnancy in the application of internal rhythm, pacing, structure, and organization of raw materials. Just one listen through the Dark Alceste de Socaï Vômie LP (*Tristesse Psychotronique*, RRR, 1991) opens up a world of agony and strangeness seemingly undeveloped in recent times. Like ancient Egyptian scientists and their innovations in astronomy, biology, and mathematics, it may be that our predecessors have forgotten more about audio pain than we'll ever learn*.

It's not just older techniques that can be re-evaluated, but the context of presentation. Something struck me while editing this issue's mammoth Broken Flag article, a detail seldom discussed in experimental music coverage: THIS MATERIAL WAS NOT CREATED IN A VACUUM. Gary Mundy and others mention a group 'heading across town' after a New Blockaders performance at Morden Tower to catch The Alarm. Many of the most violent Power Electronics acts (Uncommunity, Ramleh, Ethnic Acid) also had rock or pop projects that were treated with equal weight. While the refinements of the noise imperative have resulted in new levels of virtuosity and production, the possibility of self-imposed ghettoization is never far off. Purists tend to be twitchy on this issue, suggesting that the inclusion of anything resembling 'music' (beats, pitched notes, singing, melodic samples) dilutes the power. Maybe it does. But to completely ignore such options means working with a limited palette. One reason why early Ramleh, Whitehouse, and others sounds fresh and vital even now is in part because these projects were kicking against something specific. Noise influenced only by noise can go flat and tepid, creating an internal feedback loop with no way out.

If you enjoy these windows into brief moments of noise history, drop us a line; we'd like to know what's really catching your interest.

* If Marc Alhanati is out there and reading this, PLEASE contact us.

RAMLEH



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OPINION COLUMNS

Tunnel Canary. Jihad (artwork detail)

TUNNEL CANARY: SIDEWALK PROVOCATEURS

BY GX JUPITTER-LARSEN

Tunnel Canary was first active in the Pacific Northwest from 1978 to about 1984.

Aleh (Nathan Holiday) would play his guitar with a saw. More throttling than cutting, the guitar strings would be strangled by the teeth of the saw blade. Meanwhile, Ebra Ziron would scream, and I mean you just couldn't believe such a HUGE voice could ever come out of such a little person! Ebra wouldn't be able to talk for days after a show. It was punky female squealing over proto-Power Electronics.

In a historical context, the onset of Tunnel Canary is very interesting because it's a perfect foreshadowing of the progression that would later take place from the end of what was the Industrial scene in the early '80s to the beginning of what would later become the Noise scene in the late '80s.

Although there has been a resurgence of this style during the double-zero decade, Power Electronics was originally that transitional period from extreme Industrial to pure noise during the 1980s. The transition I'm talking about is the natural evolution towards a greater and greater distortion of sound. The idea that distortion illustrates transformation has become central for many pioneering noisicians. When distortion becomes a fetish for sound, noise is the result. This is because sound is transformed into noise by distortion.

At the time, TC was never thought of as being part of either the Industrial or Noise scene. They were often referred to as No Wave. But unlike any other act that might have had that same label, the sound of TC was far more abstractly and absurdly structured. TC simply pushed things much further than any other punk act at the time. They weren't just complex. They weren't just subversive.
The energy of their sound was as excessive as their performances were brief. It was like receiving concise punches to the head from within your own brain. Always dazed afterwards, you never felt the same having had experienced them.

Their first performances were daytime hit-and-run attacks on the sidewalks of busy downtown streets. Think prolonged tantric chanting condensed down to a concise detonation. It was Ebra without a mic and Aleh with some cheap electric guitar and pig-nose amp. These street performances drew spontaneous crowds of hundreds. Often people would think Ebra was actually having a seizure of some kind. So many people would be blocking the street that the authorities wouldn't be able to get through in time to catch TC before they ran off in the opposite direction to make their escape.

Their subsequent shows, with David Sheftel as the third canary, were longer but no less sonically outrageous. A Tunnel Canary show had layer after layer of racket fragments bouncing somewhere between the back of your teeth and your inner ear. They were the classical complaint against calm, and the archetypal battle against boredom. They made you realize there was more to punk than just safety pins and leather.

I remember seeing them open up for a William Burroughs reading in 1981. They blew the PA in seconds! Nathan I know doesn't care much for that one, but I remember Burroughs telling me how he loved it. We all loved it.

TC was a wake-up call for those of us fortunate enough to catch them live in those early days. When we heard them, we heard the future, and the future was going to be loud!

TC was about throwing a wrench into the system, yet people wanted TC to repeat the same things over again and over again. Ebra and Nathan's personal relationship was ending, and so was that of Tunnel Canary. It was time for everyone to move on and explore other activities.

The impact of TC has been long since overshadowed by some 20-plus years of the global sonic uprising we call the Noise scene. Now-a-days, few are actually familiar with the audio insurgency that once was Nathan Holiday & company. That may soon change. The time has come to re-examine and give a more balanced perspective to TC's position in noise history.

In 2008, Filmmaker Erik Lohrenz completed a TC documentary.

A few years ago, Holiday released *Jihad*, a limited-edition CD of early TC recordings. It's a kind of 'best of' presentation. In 2008, Rundownsun released the TC LP *Jihad/Live* at the *ECCA*. It's packaged in-between two double-sided panels and includes a large fold-out poster. The LP consists of the two longer tracks from *Jihad*. The first 200 copies, however, are bundled with a bonus 12-inch featuring an unreleased live recording from 1981. Rundownsun also has plans soon for a TC Archival Series on cassette.

GX Jupitter-Larsen records both under the Haters moniker and his own name, writes books, makes films, and lives his life amidst piles of newly-created rubble.

PLUCKING OBSCURITIES

BY STEVE UNDERWOOD

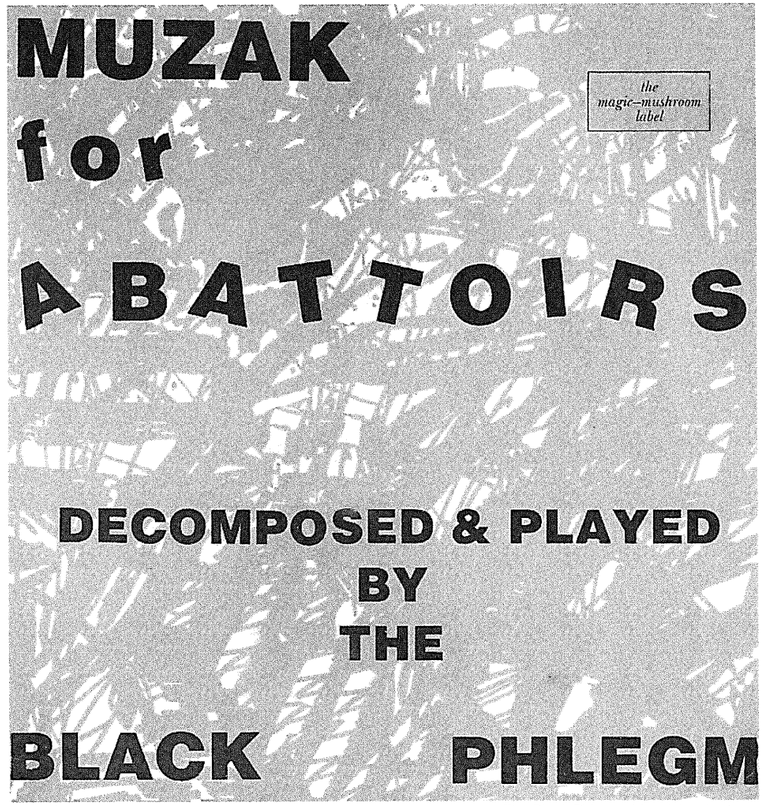
THE BLACK PHLEGM
Muzak for Abaltoirs LP
Magic Mushroom, 1989

There's always a certain smug satisfaction when a Google search for information on a scarce vinyl slice offers no real results other than a couple of hopeful record dealers offering copies at inflated prices. So for many, this private-press album of The Black Phlegm will remain a mystery, but almost two decades after its release, it should be of much interest to many due to both the instrumentation used on the album and its take on animal welfare issues. Questions like how many got pressed will remain unanswered.

Released when the pre-World Serpent team operated from the back corner of the Vinyl Experience store based on central London's Hanway Street (even though they were too focused on pushing up the second-hand values of old NWW and C93 recordings), they still found time to distribute the occasional oddity mostly via the pages of *Record Collector*, which is where I picked up this album upon its release. I'm sure the advert referenced Maurizio Bianchi, but his name is absent from the promotional sheet, which opts to pinpoint TG, Neubauten, SPK, the Velvets, and *Two Virgins* Ono & Lennon as the starting blocks. More confusion is thrown up as the sleeve comments on similarities with the work of "German Synth Wizard, Klaus Schultz." Then, add into the mix that the record's package makes subtle (and not-so subtle) drug references, and you could be forgiven for thinking we're heading out to Stonersville, Michigan, and not the "journey into madness" claimed by the album's subtitle.

The album was 'decomposed' by 'Ellis Dee' (say the name out loud to 'get' the joke), a Somerset-based musician, with the seven movements of the title recorded between October 1986 and February 1989 and spread over two sides of vinyl. Conceived as a reaction to the continual, wasteful, mindless slaughter of millions of animals a year so they can enter the food chain, be it from the all-too-common slaughterhouse to the birds and dogs that are killed and eaten as a 'delicacy,' Dee created this album as "an Electric Symphony in memory to the forgotten millions of animals who have died needlessly."
He claims that it's the ultimate in piped muzak that, for best results, should be played back at maximum volume. Obviously affected and angered, like many, by the mass slaughter, but unlike the direct-action approach offered, and actively applied, by the more militant activist outfits of the time, the best reaction Black Phlegm could suggest was to "get stoned out of your head," sadly, but it's comforting to see a precursor to the works and concerns of, amongst too few, Dave Phillips and modern-day Merzbow.

'Movement One' is the main focus of the first side, with its twenty minute duration, and for those with a keen interest in unschooled composition, this piece offers much. It shuffles along like cattle being loaded into a truck, with an occasional scattershot keyboard tinkle and high-pitched intrusion for contrast. The track manages to evoke anguish, horror and an impending sense of the inevitable. Eventually, we pass through the slaughterhouse gates and into the fifty-two seconds of the Second Movement, which is an imaginary dialogue from the butcher over the raw screech of sharpening knives. This leads into the dark swirls of mounting tension that, after flipping the album, descends into the horror show of 'Movement Three.'



The Black Phlegm. Muzak For Abaltoirs

It's here that mankind and its inhumanity is soundtracked most effectively as introductory samples on 'medical research' are buried and underpinned by a sorrowful keyboard which builds until a split-second sound drop-out ushers in the executioner, and the tension is kept high by the creeping synth rumble. When the muffled sound of a rhythm box (ala early Nocturnal Emissions) is rolled out onto the blood-stained floor, it (oddly enough) keeps the mood of distress going, and is the nearest pointer to that early '80s Industrial sound. More narration is worked into a looped, pitch-shifting frenzy, and then after a moment's reflection, a piercing chorus of final screams and saw blades is backed by a Bianchi-inspired lament. As that piece bleeds out (so to speak), the mournful choral effects that follow come as a relief. It would be too easy to think of 'Movement Seven' and its minute of silence as a representation of death, but I prefer to see it as a mark of respect for those who have suffered inside Dee's abattoir. With the 'journey into madness' now over, the album's bold claim about being "the ultimate in a field of ambient music" stands as a valid one. Unfortunately, the real madness continues.

Steve Underwood runs the Harbinger Sound label and is currently based in Nottingham, England.

THREE BELLS IN THE DUNCAN

BY MARK WHARTON

Being of the opinion that since 1985 mainstream radio has been nothing more than a lesson in regurgitation, it would be heartening to find Smell & Quim in next week's charts with Radio 2's Ken Bruce selecting 'Doddy's Cock' as his pick of the week. In a progressive, forward thinking world, perverted industrial noise filth as daytime radio entertainment should be nothing more than an evolutionary progression; instead, those brave enough to indulge still have to suffer a sea of ever-recurring homogenous pap. How sad. With the added support of weekend newspaper columnists waxing eloquently about how they always preferred the first wave of UK noise to the second generation pedal pushers, the airwaves will be full of choice brain-fermenting noise and the world will be a better place. It'll never happen of course.

Catching Smell & Quim live at the Bradford 1 in 12 Club in late '95 was an epiphany. Within thirty insane minutes my future had been fixed. Watching Milovan Srdenovic and D. Foist emerge from black bin liners dressed as Elvis (Elvi?) was weird enough, but to follow it up with ear bleeding feedback wrought from shamanic shakers and god knows what else was enough to melt my already half boggled brain. Foist clambered onto the bar and kicked

pint pots off it with his six inch stack heel boots, his newly shaved head was stuck with the remnants of his hair which Srdenovic had earlier cropped as opening entertainment. People fled in terror, brave drunken souls stuck it out near the front, but most of us cowered at the back dodging the flying beer and broken glass wondering if we were ever going to hear our own voices again.

Smell & Quim have been quiet of late, but with new blood in the camp, its sole surviving member and sickness guru Milovan Srdenovic has secured some live action, and with *Powerfuck* has given us their first release in ten years. And then there's the first track, 'Doddy's Cock.' For those not yet troubled by Smell & Quim's affair with surreal British humour, Doddy is Ken Dodd, an eighty year old comedian-cum-entertainer with jutting teeth and wild hair whose made up language and goggle-eyed looks makes you wish he was actually in Smell & Quim, tickling stick or not. 'Doddy's Cock' is a slow sweep of the arm, a clearing away of the table of cluttered noise pretenders. Its a statement of intent that the UK's premier noise perverts are back. Slowly building to almost unbearable levels of pain, hearing 'Doddy's Cock' for the first time is like welcoming back an old friend, and just when you think you cant take it no more, it cuts and there's a Dalek squawking Dodd-related obscenities. It's enough to bring a tear to the eye. Smell & Quim were never just about noise per se, though as *Powerfuck* reveals, even though they can still mix it with the best in that field, it's the use of gay porn samples, toilet humour, parping, and track titles like 'Pipers at the Flaps of Dawn' that have become permanent treasured memories. 'Pipers at the Flaps' always raised a smile round these parts and here it is again in a 'Sex Pest Mix,' with a Peter Wyngardian growled 'rape' repeated ad infinitum into a whorl of processed noise thump. Sacred cows Whitehouse are despatched with accurate poisoned darts during 'Fuckseed' and a live visitation of 'Sweet Tooth.' In the former, recent signing Michael Gillham does his flat Northern accented best to outdo Best; against a wall of whistling feedback, Gillham tells his girlfriend to go away and not come back again whilst reminding her that she had strange sexual tendencies. In the latter, Simon Harris outdoes Bennett with a histrionic fit filched straight from the early Susan Lawly back catalogue. *Powerfuck* is an essential ingredient in today's UK noise firmament and will hopefully earn Smell & Quim some lucrative gigs from those brave enough to book 'em, but get it anyway just to have a CD in your house that has a track on it called 'My Cock Smells Like Shit.'

There's more Smell & Quim courtesy of Industrial Recollections. Goldenrod was a short series of releases featuring contributions reworked by Ulex Xane. Xane's early '90s cassette label Zero Cabal spat out a slew of noise muck, including some of his own notorious Strechier material, but only three Goldenrods appeared (Macronympha and Odal being the other two). Xane's work on Smell & Quim became *Korova Scumhaters*, a manifestation of early '90s noise that is of more than passing interest. Its darkening moods of Industrial waste coupled with Smell & Quim's trademark porn samples and diarrhea attacks still manages to entertain in a far more intriguing way than any of the post-apocalyptic experimental Industrial acts currently clogging up Myface. The sound quality is reminiscent of the era, of course. Still, there's not many better ways of passing a day than wallowing in early '90s tape mulch.

In an ideal world, it would have been the Incapacitants who shared the stage with Smell & Quim that memorable night. I had to wait until 2007 and the New York No Fun Fest for that one, but the wait was worth it. Witnessing Toshiji Mikawa and Fumio Kosakai spasm like two electrified epileptics whilst been slowly crowded out of their own stage isn't something you witness every week. Kosakai's backward stage dive into a sweaty mass of hopped up noise freaks, timed to coincide exactly with the plugs being pulled, was the signal for the most ecstatic, spontaneous outpouring of joy I've ever witnessed. They rarely tour, even inside Japan, so any sighting is rabidly documented, thus the two live tracks on *Lon Guy*. It's not the same as getting all sweaty and coming home smelling of spilt beer, but it's the nearest you're going to get without buying plane tickets. *Lon Guy* kicks off with a scraping, disgorged 'Take It!', a clatter of jarring electronic skree whose disjointedness becomes increasingly mesmeric. 'Go!' and 'Say!' are the shorter works that build up to the two live tracks, which is where the Incapacitants shine the brightest — it's not for nothing that they're held in the highest regard when it comes to live performance. Hearing them live involves becoming enveloped in a writhing, seething mass of darting, shifting gobbets of psyched-up, shot-out weld spatter. The longer these pieces go on (here they're 17 minutes apiece), the more you get sucked into that vortex and the better it gets.

If someone could arrange that Incapacitants / Smell & Quim double bill, I'd be more than happy.

Mark Wharton published the Just Glittering fanzine throughout the '90s and the Idwal Fisher fanzine in the early '00s, but now has settled for an online presence. He proudly calls Cleckheaton, West Yorkshire home.

* * *

PATHWAY RECORDS - WALK WITH A MUG

BY JOHN OLSON

So I was chilling in the windy city the other weekend, getting my head thrown in a microwave on high watching NO FUCKER jam, when this urban punk dude pushes up on me and says:

"Hey man...kool jacket...nice patches..."
"Thanks homey, you like that Finnish stuff?"
"Yeah, except for the Terveet Kadet jams that sound like Danzig."
"Word. Whadda gonna do, no ones perf..."
"What's that other patch? With the two little kids holding hands?"
"It's this Xian label outta Ypsilanti Michigan called PATHWAY, a mystery dude named RED ELLIS owned it, it's like the YALTA HI LIFE of crude Xian."
"Fuck that. I'm out."

And that was that. The kid left SHOOK. Not stoked. But that ain't really that strange of an occurrence. I got a special 'collector's paradise' with this primitive Christian local wax. No one wants to talk about, hold on to it, much less seek and destroy with it. Straight up jammers' taboo. Rules. I only know of one other local weird wax hound I can clap about it with - my main man Brian "Wazzer" Woz.

Mike Connelly was into it for a minute but after a heavy mushroom trip with the Harvest Flight and Earthen Vessel reboots he had a weird experience he didn't wanna talk about and jetted from the style. So let me explain the magic. If you're reading this zine, you're probably the type that's searching for that exotic and idiosyncratic sound. That "locals only" mind/soul claustrophobic approach makes your ears sweat. You want *Russia Bombs Finland* to be an assault of drunken teen desperate-attack, you want the Yetties to keep singing about how a "good glass of ale tells its own story," you need Kikret Kizilok to sound like the best hash you ever passed around at a coma party, it's Alton Ellis you seek when you want to be rocksteadily told you are "moving cause of white man's plan." You want everything to turn to concrete? You jam the *Density* double tape on G.R.O.S.S. You already know that all the classic Chilean records have bird sounds on them to emulate paradise. Shit, My Cat is an Alien ain't really got that slot on the BOOT FROM THE GOOT comp, right?

Isolated sound makes the best music. So take that blatant localism one step down to the basement of a dusty small bungalow on 508 Maus St. in Ypsilanti where a small group of weirdo congregation members get together to solemnly play crude lo-fi outta tune songs to abstract ideas of forever and "who owns the title to heaven." Imagine a Back From the Grave mentality but take away the wild sex youth outta control and replace it with your sister, a Sunday morning, a grandmother, an ancient no-fidelity mixer board powered by unspoken peace and funded by Purple Heart receiver RED ELLIS, take away booze, drugs, punk and cassettes and call it Pathway Records, and you'd be close.

Now everyone and their crew knows that Avant Garde, GIA, Inner Varsity and Covenant are solid Xian labels; I've even read in the DISTORT zine that everything on IMPACT and LIGHT blows orchestrated ass chunks; but this is prime Mid-Michigan crude-age in the style of *The Shades of '70s*, *The Brown Family*, *Hey Jesus Christ*, *Welcome to This World*, and other classic rare LPs of the sacred style. If this ain't your bag, don't sweat it because you ain't never gonna find this lurch ANYWHERE. Especially outside of the Ypsi-to-Flint US-23 highway wax hidden corners. I've never found any Pathway LPs outside of the 30 mile area where the basement magic sound studio on Maus Street was. Red Ellis was heavy involved in the bluegrass scene; he was a part of the popular Huron Valley Boyz group and was active in the Ann Arbor and Ypsi radio scene. He gained faith after getting shot in the mouth and leg in Korea. Red was a home recording fanatic, sometimes using one mic with no mixer and having the performers move around acoustically. The Pathway records have a strong heavy Bluegrass backbone but the religious calmness and awkwardness keeps it unique, odd and strange.

There is no date on the records but reading about Red I'll take a stab to say early '60s. Every time we have a liver suicide party with the maniacs here at the Frying Pan at 2 a.m., I always slip on some Pathways to stir it up. Fits snug right in between the Urinals and Zyklon 7-inchers. I've gotten the crew saying:

"Turn that shit off, this is a party."
"I haven't heard this Patty Waters record..."
"....makes the Shaggs sound like Negative FX...."
"Guess the party's over, all the chicks are too freaked out..."
"Is this on Fenton or Hideout Records?"
"I think the dude from The Kegs is bonerville in his casket now."

Rules. To make matters more in my favour, the network of Soul 45 searchers who sell records just GIVE this shit to me. They don't want it, can't sell it, don't even want to talk about it. After a recent trip to the local wax shop, a huge box of free LPs outside the door yielded an upgrade on the Jonathan and Charles' *Another Week to Go* and *Local Gospel Hot & Cool* rarities. A junkie's dream come true, free constant connect. The amazing no-sex no-money crude sound of the cryptic Xian LPs just raining around a mug. A lot of punx can't deal with the message but at the end of the day, I would rather hear outta tune local songs about love. Which is really no different then music on the Sounds for Consciousness Rape label or the singer from UNICEF leaping off the roof of a squat. Hey, we are all looking for SOMETHING...right?

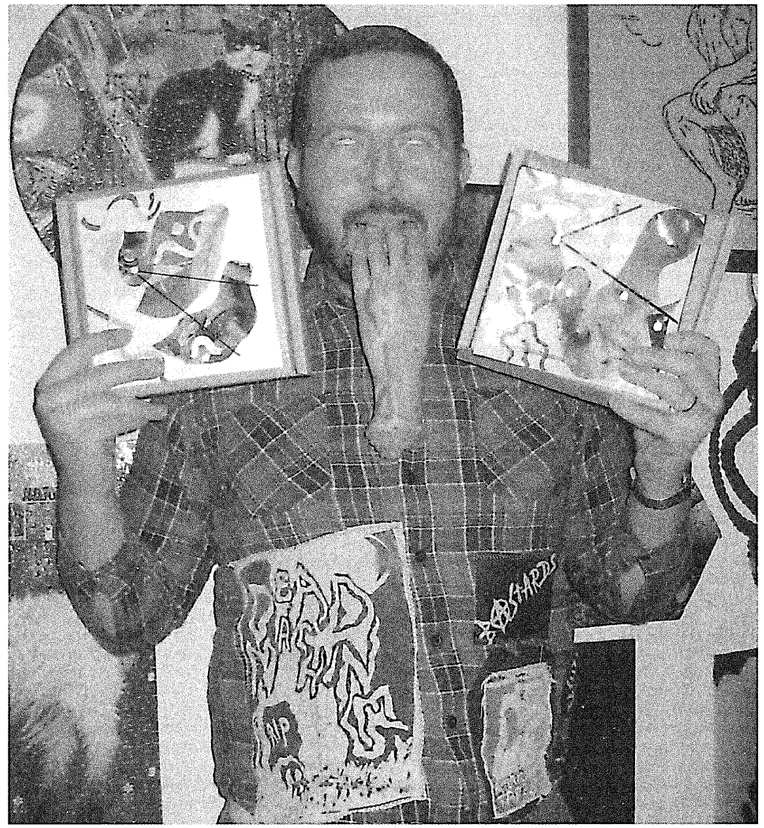
• THE RECORDS •

PLP 185 The Bradys, Sing Come A Little Closer — Let's start with the one that hooked me in: Bob, Darlene, and Chuck jam the ultimate record to the soundtrack of your "eternity struggle." If the 'A Boy and His Kite' song doesn't wring you out to dry, then no private press LP ever will. This is Grade-A prime yodel lonerism. Great songs, ice fem vocals, echoey sound; this is the ONE. The group is led by Rev. Brady, who led the "Soul Winning Clinics" in Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana. Maybe he hit the legendary Xian stoner spot the Keyhole, home of the amazing *The Way In* GIA LP for a clinic session? This platter also has the lonely string pluckings of a Blaine Rhodes on it for extra isolationism. Has liners by the Singing Avilas. Yellow labels. Great cover unique to the Path cannon as well, not a custom sleeve but a nice abstract music note design.

PLP 156 Ruthella Smith, The Lord is My Light and Other Sacred Songs — Organ, piano, and vocals. Not the one to start with. It's no Irma Glen but it will do. The 'band' is Smith, Barabar Nichols and Ruth Hartman. It's kool to have a song called 'Overshadowed' and have it be 4:20 long — but that looks better on paper than spinning with a needle on top. The pic of Smith looks like she really needs someone to grip her a brew at the Circle K party store on Huron and Cross St. Gold labels. One for the bragging pile. "Pathways wishes you many hours of enjoyable listening." Thanks.

PLP 163 The Gospel Singing Byrds, Shall I Tell You? (From the Heart) — Just a stunner. Mindfreezing basement cubist bluegrass no-talent twang, as lonely and engaging as a winter afternoon alone. Best 2-5 p.m. music (re: NOT 2 a.m. — leave that for Booker Little's 'Out Front,' any solo Art Tatum, Red Television, Bastards *Live at Haar Ha* and Contents Are LPs) alive. Strange band indeed with heartbreaking liners from lead Byrd Bernice, now living in Flint — home of the landmine of Xian Cruddites. She claims she has had polio since age three, been in a million operations, always knocking on death's door, has never been able to walk and after a 'miracle' she was finally able to have a child — Debby, who is the other vocalist on this amazing and beautifully raw recording. Just steams with soul-crunching ache. Old lady drumming from Norma O'Neil and wicked single pluck basement leads from Jim McMillian make this one stand out in the style. Very similar to the Brown Family and Friends LP from nearby Elsie, Michigan. It just doesn't get any better and more sex-free weird/slow wild than this Singing Bird Band. Red labels. Found this ultra rarity SEALED at Encore, the only Pathway in the huge Xian section they had at this Ann Arbor record store.

PLP 189 The Singing Avilas — Charming. Piano, primitive bass by son Tony, and echoey alone in a church basement soundscape make this solid. Not the twanging heartache of previous Paths, this one is an intimate Latino family affair. This their second; haven't seen or have hopes of finding the debut. Great cover; momma Avila is a cutie!! Contains the first Michigan song title with "Whatever" in it - which could have come from a basement gig gone sour or something. Great primitive back cover and green labels. Green labels. Will trade Tovah Olson for the debut if anyone's got it.



John Olson. Photo by Tovah Olson

PLP 162 The Walkers and the Crossmen, Walking on That Glory Road — Kinda confusing. It has Southern 'star' Emerson Walker and his wife Clarine joining the group the Crossmen and having the superfamily Singing Byrds adding off-key harmony. Kinda gives blood to the whole 'twang'/disjointed mutant bluegrass vibe of the Path LPs. Really great LP, kind of hollow and evil sounding. Slow, mourning jams; really like zero fidelity soul sugar torture. Great 'talking' parts. Again, the guitarist in the Crossmen could have been the missing link in *You Walk Alone* and other Jandek LPs. Great stock photo sleeve. Contains the only Path 'statement' on the back — the amazing "Throughout the United States — even at this date, throughout the whole world — there are thousands of people to whom gospel singing is not only a musical experience, but one of enduring spiritual value as well. This Pathway recording is scientifically designed to play with the highest quality." Someone's gotta find them scientists and grip them a brew for the creature sound artistry. Gold labels. Capital of Stokerville.

PLP 159 The Taylor Bros (Marvin & Minnis), He's Real — Super duper one here. Craggy echo sound, great songs. Tennessee bluegrass imports, they moved to Detroit and begun their unique basement brand of sound/soul searching. Smiling duo style looks similar to the aforementioned Jonathan and Charles record. Amazing stock pic sleeve. Gold labels. Uplifting but loner approach. Great. Think I gripped this bad boy in Southfield, Michigan at a big thrift store where tons of Xian monsters hid waiting to find homes, like *Bright and Morning Star* by Sue Smith, Jeff Deem and the Miracle band and the rare *Because I Am* LPs.

PLP 158 The Walkers and the Crossmen, Under New Management — Last one in the pile, has owner Red on it via member of the Crossmen on mandolin. Better and more cubistic than the previous one, PLP 162. Strange eerie sound, very creepy. Has a pic of what I guess is the local church on the cover but can't tell, never seen it around Ypsi. Great liners by Red stating how he forgot he put out the earlier Walkers record. Duh. Maybe the title is a sign of things to come. Later in life seems like Red and his wife took to the basement and went digital, but digging through area thrifts for 'private CDrs' seems like a daunting task. But whatever sound PATH the label and crew took, this selection of sounds from a mystery Bermuda triangle yielded amazing and uh...eternal results.

John Olson runs the American Tapes label, is a member of Wolf Eyes, and is involved with projects too numerous to mention.

THE DARK SIDE OF NOISE

BY MIKKO ASPA

Every time someone sighs in relief that Power Electronics and Noise have definitely gotten rid of their ugly roots in 'shock tactics,' I feel like that person is missing the point. Failing to realize that the existence of the material isn't simply because it would be shocking, just like the original deeds and responsible people were not meant to be shocking either. All the nasty sex, violence, & simplified, root-level, single-minded politics is often there for a reason. In personal meetings with involved artists, it's easy to see how their personal interests, commitments and obsessions play a key role when it comes to the art they produce. In times of meaningless jams, noise based merely on high standard of living or mindset of the contemporary artist, etc., it seems healthy that at least a fragment of the scene remains that at one time could have been seen as 'standard.' Of course, a standard that never really was there in SUCH a dominating force, but that still, decades later, taints the reputation of hard, anti-musical sound. In many cases, bands of today have taken it further, developed it into logical conclusions that probably guarantees that it will never be accepted outside genre and its fans, unless the artists are willing to sacrifice their work under apologetic explanations and pretentious art theories.

Japan's newcomer Gaze Campaign's tape *Gestal Bruise* is the Lust Vessel label's debut release. It offers exactly what one could ask if looking for true sound of Power Electronics today. They never give up the grainy, distorted and crude analogue sound policy, but unlike some 'old-school' retro bands of today, Gaze Campaign never settles for cheap imitation or easy solutions through modern equipment. In all its filthiness, their sound is rich, multilayered, passionately handcrafted, and each track contains plenty of variation. Decayed tape-manipulation sound is always present with the electronics, crushing noises and vocals that owe much more to European '80s sound than anything from their homeland. One could refer fans of Ethnic Acid, oldest Putrefier, Ramleh, Uncommunity, etc., to see the modern equivalent, a variation which doesn't sound like a mere replica of the past.

Liver Mortis started with wanky synth sounds. His intent to go back to the glory days of the Italian Power Electronics sound didn't sound very successful until a handful of tapes was released where he seemed to get a better clue what has to be done. Tapes titled such as *Amateur Pornography*, *Suited Treatment*, *Scenes of Consequence* (some of these with 'sister-band' Pleasure Fluids), etc. are no longer available. Extremely limited editions of tapes secured obscurity for the project. At its best, his fierce feedback, simple raw noise and vocals could be satisfactory for those who yearn for sheer violence once delivered by Sutcliffe Jügend, Mauthausen Orchestra, or Male Rape Group. Variation of styles presented in Liver Mortis tapes shows the artist is still developing. Hopefully, someday we'll see a full-length album.

One of oldest Finnish noise groups, Bizarre Uproar has been active since 1992. Occasionally lying dormant, but especially during recent years, BU blossomed to its highest burst of activity. Despite originally coming outside the actual 'Industrial Noise' scene, his tastes for musical and visual damage always reflected the nastiest side of Noise imaginable. These have been highly productive year with countless new releases, each competing for highest position in levels of filth. Releases are often known for high degree of personal input. Members involved in games with excrement and other bodily fluids, hard-core humiliation, and S&M play with very little modern playful fetish games, rather all about politically-incorrect perversity. The sound of BU's releases often reflect this as well, delivering a painful and refreshingly violent sound often lacking in modern day Noise. Obsession for feedback, metal junk abuse, screaming voice spewing out obscenities, and fast cut-up live noises are often present, but Bizarre Uproar little by little evolves into new directions, making basically every release worth owning.

Japanese project Molester is barely known, but it is very easy to forgive the dull artwork of the debut CDr when meeting the artist himself, who explains with broken English that his theme and interests include pedophilia, child abuse and abduction. CDr releases like *Our Kids*, *Our Business* and *Object Libido* offer a modern-day sickening Power Electronics assault which draws influence from the extreme wall-of-noise type of approach. Full-on electronics and distortion pedal assault is only distracted with a few vocal or sample additions.

For experts of the genre, it might not require too much spy work to realize who is behind the magnificent SNUFF project. Anybody can say, 'yeah, this clichéd name has been already used by other bands decades ago,' but that remains irrelevant when taking a look at what this really is. The debut release came out of nowhere to terrorize the scene. The 12-inch slab of transparent red vinyl that just came out represents Finnish Power Electronics at its best. Feedback and crude electronics with vocals are the main elements in this. That doesn't sound like anything 'new,' and indeed, it isn't. But how it is done is far beyond the normal boundaries of the current scene. There is a total absence of entertainment values: no 'kickass' bass rumbling, no neat drones, no crushing loops, etc. Recording is done live at the rehearsal bunker, with a circle of amplifiers surrounding the two members of band and recording to...I believe tape deck?? What we get is pure Power Electronics in the finest tradition of the most extreme tracks by Sutcliffe Jügend, Ramleh or Whitehouse's *New Britain*, etc. I could also mention Grunt *Last Grip to Sanity* LP or some of Taint's most PE oriented materials as reference?? Feedback is sometimes very pure, high-pitched and hard, nearly reaching the test tone frequencies of Dominator. In song, there might be just very minimal elements, like the mentioned piercing feedback and perverted vocals. Each track is only 'rock 'n' roll' length, so in all their extremity, they are still relatively short pieces to digest. In some of the tracks, crude loops make the backing sound, but they never sound 'crunchy' and 'heavy,' more like drill-in-the-ear. In some of the tracks, they have two vocalists at the same time, and I dare to say that they manage to top Sektion B, Bloodyminded, etc. with the clever use of double vocals. It's probably a pure accident and an unplanned thing how the vocal arrangements have come up (?), but probably intuition guided it to perfection? Anyone tired of clean-, thick 'n' heavy-, modern-, non-violent-, post-Power Electronics, SNUFF LP is the essential catch. I couldn't recommend any other band more at this point. Only warning can be said that it is exactly what is described, and not for all tastes. Black disco sleeve contains 2 xeroxed inserts with the nastiest possible hand-written layout.

In spring 2009, after an obscure, hardly-distributed promo release, the anonymous American project COUNTRY CLUB exposed a massive double LP work for an unprepared audience. Presumably sold out in advance from the small label, even if very little to nothing was known about the project by most. It's two 45rpm 12-inches in a normal plain white sleeve, xeroxes pasted on front and back with a very primitive quality. Folded insert with lyrics inside. White labels stamped indicating sides, reminding us of the old days of Power Electronics.

Critical ears could say this could have been a good single LP; it's decent, but there are also weak points. Hysterical high-pitched squealing vocals don't feel very suitable for serious topics like this. Many of the compositions remain fairly good, but they work predominantly in rock 'n' roll style — it's basic 'riffing' for the songs. There are hardly any highly phenomenal sounds or very much that would be catching a lot of attention. It's more like some rumble or some distortion here and there. Best tracks are actually the ones with interesting, on-topic samples, and gloomy synth works. They manage to capture the spirit of the concept in most accurate way. I don't think it would have required this much material to cover the concept, though. Almost every track deals the same short situation of Ruby Ridge case, where FBI illegally invaded and shot innocent people who only wished to be left alone in their isolated home. The record slowly elaborates every significant moment of this brutal story, including simple moments like dog and son being shot, or mother shot through door, etc. Best lyrics are in the second track of B side, 'Depleted Meat': ALL I WANTED, WAS SOME PEACE, AWAY FROM EVERYTHING. AMERICA HAS CHANGED; IT WILL NEVER BE HOW I IMAGINED IT. POISONED, FILLED WITH SCUM. VERMIN. I WANTED A PLACE ALL MY OWN. The band doesn't need to come out as 'offensive.' They arent yelling vulgarities or any sort of political extremes. But I find it regrettable that the performance of these lyrics can't carry the emotion of betrayal, a paranoid and serious man seeking to leave society behind. High-pitched screaming with blurring distortion over screeching feedback and white noise is something totally different. I think abandoning the hardcore-thrash 'brutality' in favour of clarity of message and more artistic qualities would have been beneficial. Conceptual field recs, deep voice with different approach, and so on.

The good thing is that there is variety in songs. It's not the same thing going on over and over again, with 15 tracks spread over four sides. I think this Country Club 2xLP is good. I doubt this is a soon-to-be classic, but I prefer to have it in my collection. Those who want to find something utterly mind-blowing, a record that brings something new to PE can look elsewhere. Will this project proceed into other topics, or was this it? That would be interesting to know. This project still shows that there are unexplored topics beyond the usual icons of Power Electronics. The need for another release of Dahmer, Sutcliffe, Jim Jones, Jon-Benet or whoever, isn't absolutely necessity. When we look at the world, it is already an ugly reality, all day, everyday. And some of the bands are still willing to deal with it beyond escapist jams and artistic isolation.

This is just a very brief look what is happening. One should also remember that plenty of old-timers and even legendary bands of the genre remain active, producing unpopular yet highly addictive material. Reissues of classic material have been done, and there are doubtlessly more on the way. A wonderful world of nasty noise is out there, and it's not going away.

Mikko Aspa records as Grunt and under other aliases. He runs the Freak Animal label and also publishes Special Interests magazine. He is based in Lahti, Finland.

VOMIR / HÉLICOPTRÈ SANGLANTE

BY HICHAM CHADLY

• VOMIR •

HICHAM CHADLY, AS LOUD AS POSSIBLE: **I was told you're 13 years old...**

ROMAIN PERROT, VOMIR: **Kumiko, my Japanese lovedoll, is a little older. She is beautiful and I love her still attitude. She loves to think that she is the first noise-making lovedoll. I suggest you also quit living person relationships.**

HC: **Please send me a picture of Kumiko, or is that her on the *Dall Woll* cassette cover?**

V: **No. that was another model.**

HC: **Do you have more enemies than friends?**

V: **I stand ignored and ignorant of everything. Foolish is the one who puts his care in people or in any creature whatsoever.**

HC: **I saw you live recently. You distributed some garbage bags before your set so people can isolate their heads. That was so considerate...really, really touching.**

V: **The decline of the self in the harsh noise wall requires the development of a pure indeterminacy that will forge into oblivion without saying. The ego needs to be lost: the man must be aware of the abyss without implementing an interval of time or promiscuity. Just to let it sink in the moment. During the wall of noise — HNW — in a state of isolation caused by the plastic bag, it is working to acquire the impossible to believe in one another.**

HC: **I understand nothing. But that's okay. Tell me about your daily life and environment.**

V: **The nothingness, the void is the space to which the human creatures must, more than think, reveal in the retreat. In this nothingness, the practice is to let things be meaningless: it is the socialized human starting the service, which understands things. This rejection is the disqualification of the social world.**

HC: **What's going on with Turgid Animal?**

V: **Turgid Animal and At War With False Noise are releasing an uncompromising sound ordeal. Noise deafens us. We are blinded. It is the darkness of this spiritual ordeal which spreads over me clarity of the 'Ordre Abimiste.'**

HC: **Do you ever tour?**

V: **I guess you mean physically? Be (a)live is a fact that in any place, in any time claustration becomes an act of amputation in relation to the world.**

HC: **David Tudor?**

V: **Listening to his music for piano recently released on Edition RZ challenges all improv/onkyo/noise scenes. I do drown in the glimpses of silence. The nothingness between noises. If you go deep inside this nothingness, it will release the infinite wall of noise of the death of a star whose particles had spread over space and earth where it finally evolves into human form. Each of us carries this noise, each of us must go back into it. Long and continuous listening to HNW turns the noise into silence.**

Vomir

HC: **I read in the papers that you have a very specific notion of love and sound.**

V: **I wonder what generators are in charge of annihilating industrial wastelands that make incense out of defective heat shields. Old albums for well-thought-out guiding trespass: no policy lines for strangers' decisions. I am donating to the concept of the more recordings of the monolithic noise from turbulent generators that pulverise & contaminate chunderous human plasma to lethargy. Surviving life inside melted plastic case is better than grimacing collaborations.**

Introducing yourself to procreating noise that moves inside out of you to reinvent communications is to change a line of work from beneath the wheel of a train with grave digger, much to the chagrin filled impatient passengers. It favours stability. Prefer a walking tour of tombstone defacement than dilating orifices. Are you sure no one wants to get buried in blasphemous sign-on music for a little success in new duties, studies, network?

HC: **That was very clear. Thanks.**

• HÉLICOPTÈRE SANGLANTE •

HENDRIK HEGREY, HÉLICOPTÈRE SANGLANTE: **Hmm...your questions give me a headache. But I'll try answering them. What makes you think things evolved?**

HICHAM CHADLY: **Your recent sets are longer and have somehow evolved...**

HS: **Are you sure? I am not really aware...considering that I consumed most of my synthesizers by mistreating or carrying them inappropriate ways, my most recent sets were mainly based on one or two cassette players and a mic. In addition to whatever I come across. But this might change. I have recently brought an analog oscillator from VOMIR. However, I have no idea how to suitably include it in my performances... Otherwise, improvisation is the key.**

HC: **Did you have a musical project named TRUE NORWEGIAN BLACK METAL?**

HS: **Not yet. The person I'm supposed to develop this project with has not yet been clearly identified. This will probably be my most ambitious project since our shows will take place in the middle of forests. Meanwhile, I sometimes play with Ludovic Poulet (Port Radium) under the name: Les Icones Populaires Du Mal Extreme. We play more or less every two years.**

HC: **That's nice. Do you see Andy Bolus every day?**

HS: **I see him every day passing under my window. Do you know how I discovered rythmed avant-garde music? I was once walking in the Bois de Vincennes and I found a briefcase full of mainly disgusting things...pizza slices, cast iron sculptures, etc., and wrapped in an old Simpsons t-shirt, there was a bunch of Evil Moisture cassettes. I only heard them recently...what a shock that was!!**

HC: **Why did you dance during a Jojo Hiroshige set like I would dance at a Cyndi Lauper show?**

HS: **Isn't this music incredibly funky?**

HC: You're French, right?

HS: **There's nothing I can hide from you... Are you a black Arab? Did you know that Jean-Michel Jarre is also French by the way?**

HC: **Jean Michel Jarre's first 7-inch is amazing. What's the deal with your Wang Chung obsession?**

HS: **I am! And it's somehow funny because it's a common point with Richard from FFH. He's even more obsessed. It's a real pathology, but I am in no position to make fun of him.**

HC: **Are you a classically trained pianist? Your synth playing betrays you. You're a virtuoso.**

HS: **This is very sad because I had to recently abandon this aspect in my shows because of faulty equipment. I still have an Eko Tiger Duo R organ though, but it's unfortunately too voluminous and I can hardly carry it to concerts. Hmm, I really feel you're taking the piss and making fun of me...let's carry on.**

HC: **I haven't started. You're one of the brains behind the Nazi Knife zine. I really love its concept. Collecting art and drawings from rugby players and fishermen is fantastic. How did you get in touch with those US baseball players? Michigan, Massachusetts, New York...really impressive!**

HS: **In fact, it's a total coincidence. Jonas and I didn't realize until recently, and after 4 issues, that the contributors were all high-level sportsmen. But finally, and you know I don't believe in chance, it only adds to the coherence of the project.**

HC: **Antione Marquis should be a president. Does he come to Hélicoptère Sanglante shows?**

HS: **No. He doesn't give a shit about all this noise bullshit... He stays home drawing while watching horror movies.**

Hicham Chadly runs the Nashazphone label, but spends most of his time in mid-air between Paris and North Africa.

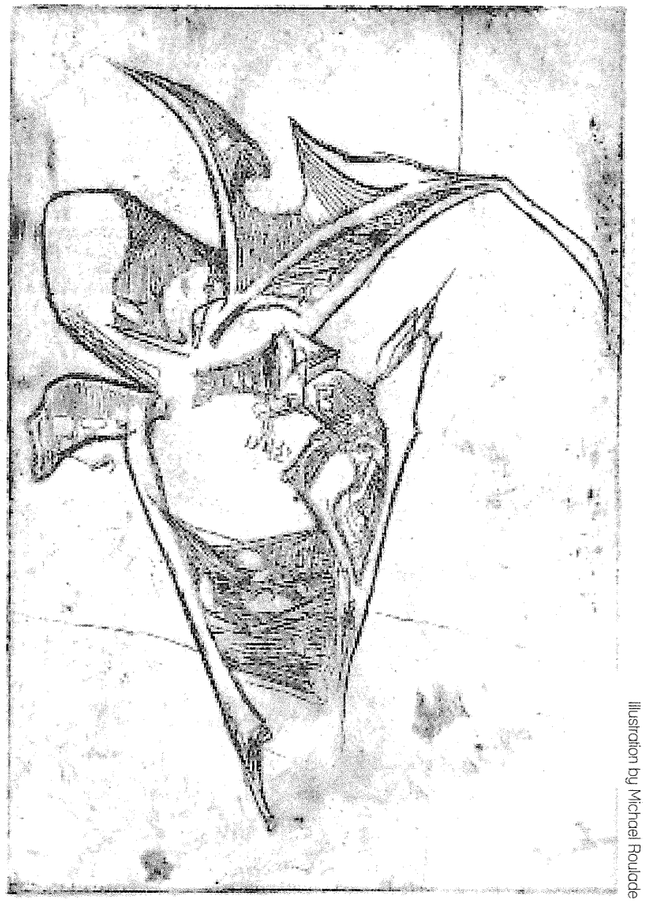


Illustration by Michael Roulade

QLIPTHOTIC ANALOGIES BY MICHAEL ROULADE

BY ANDY ORTMANN

The fragility of the microcosm is substantially sensitive to influence. Clips, spits and triggers usher in the annihilation of concurrent blindness. Prerequisites to the presentation engineered to enhance or interest a pretreated perception on the issue. There are key elements in a consistent duration and an inertia that results subtleties that speak to the laughter residing in a hall that may literally echo on forever. The idea of emotional catharsis was present when dealt with directly and acted on during sessions of deep concentration. Rhythm strengthens the memory for reiteration of the idea of this original theme.

On this topic, transgressive psychological experiments have proven most successful under specified and excruciating environments. Forced with the choices of copulation with a bug zapper or consuming of a concoction somewhere between aged room temperature human sludge and a peanut butter parfait don't leave much room for hesitation. One is led to the scientific trough of theoretical possibilities and may contemplate the mysteries of reality, only to be left with the realization that suffering should be shared with all living things. Other noted examples would include the case study number 71.

A man (Gerald) was plagued with a vulgar habit of chronic public mastication. It should also be mentioned that this was coupled with a most repugnant involuntary action which was believed to be psychosexual in nature. It was learned after deeper probing into Gerald's history that we learned a great deal more about the vastness of human thought. Gerald, a Caucasoid of some twenty-eight years, would become sexually aroused upon the sight of elderly women eating meatloaf (or other forms of red meat which had been ground). Gerald would frequent cafeteria-style eating establishments, as this would greaten his chances of re-enacting this scenario in reality. More often than not, the subject would indeed find such a woman consuming loafs of ground meat. He would then begin to masticate in attempts to feign the woman's attention. In some cases, the woman could be substituted for a man, if a woman was unavailable or unattainable. If successful, Gerald would continue masticating, increasing his motion and intensity. With the attention of his horrified onlookers, the subject would suffer a violent erection, so severe that the subject would pass out. In one case, an elderly woman performed fellatio on the subject after he had become unconscious. It was learned that he maintained an erection for an impressive sixty-seven hours afterwards.

Later interviews with the subject unveiled details which would clarify any shroud of mystery surrounding Gerald's condition. When he was much younger, he was forced to chew widely, as he would swallow his food like a vacuum (allegedly, he had once swallowed an entire cat whole), and it was feared that he would one day die from a blocked esophagus. His grandmother would see to it that he chewed hard and wide to ensure that whatever was inserted into his mouth would eventually turn to the consistency of infant stool to make sure that he wouldn't choke. In the beginning, Gerald was rewarded with various forms of venereal stimulation, though after some time, he learned to chew on his own and was weaned of this reward system. The coming years would be what we like to call his incubation period. Despite Gerald's unsavory desire for rotund specimens, it is safe to assume that the subject is no longer a threat to society at large, thanks to the scientific advancements made especially in the field of experimental psychology.

Andy Ortmann runs the Nihilist label in Chicago, and is the founding member of Panicsville.

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SWEDEN: HEAVEN OR HELL

BY JONAS KELLAGHER

The Swedish tape scene has exploded in recent years. Not since its heyday in the mid-eighties have so many tapes been released, and compared to then, the consistent quality is just daunting. Labels like Styggelse, Abisko, Gothenburg Blood Cult, and Utmarken have released so much great material that is hard to keep track of everything. But, someone's got to do the dirty work...

Källarbarnen Källarbarnen [Gothenburg Blood Cult 008]
Källarbarnen Lättjan [Nattens Bödlar #2]
On the 13th of December, 2008, Alfarmania performed a riotous show at Utmarken, in Gothenburg. Or to be correct, they did several different shows, both private and public, over the course of 36 hours. *Källarbarnen* was recorded a mere five days later on the 18th. When I listen to *Källarbarnen*, I hear a direct response to that weekend. They are maybe not consciously but nevertheless heavily influenced by the live sound of Alfarmania. The weekend was documented on two live tapes released by Styggelse: *Utmarken, GBG December 13 2008* and *Luciavaka A.T. Utmarken - Collaboration With VEHM 08.12.13.* What these tapes lack in sound quality, they amply make up for in intensity.

Källarbarnen (literally, 'The Cellar Children') could also have been called 'The Utmarken Kids,' since all participants are heavily involved with running the Utmarken co-op (1). **The self-titled debut tape is released by the mysterious Gothenburg Blood Cult label, and although the feel isn't as dirty and gritty as the usual modus operandi of GBG Blood Cult, sound-wise Källarbarnen is well in the line of cassettes that GBG Blood Cult has released the last couple of years. All GBG Blood Cult tapes are firmly rooted in the Swedish tradition of blood-drenched Noise/Industrial, such as already mentioned purveyors Alfarmania or Treriksröset or, for that matter, Blood Ov Thee Christ. Sure, Källarbarnen sound a bit lightweight compared to the older guard, but it is a really good debut nevertheless. They come across like a mix of The New Blockaders, Alfarmania and Ättestupa.**

On their second tape, *Lättjan*, it becomes clear that Källarbarnen are a band looking for their identity. If the first tape was heavily influenced by the Alfarmania performance, *Lättjan* seems to lean more towards the sound of countless Post-Punk bands of the late eighties. I'm disappointed with the turn Källarbarnen has taken, but I'm still curious to see were they will head after this.

Ättestupa Att Korsa Den Flod Som Kommer Att Dränka Oss Alla [Abisko 15]
Ättestupa have a new cassette out on Swedish label Abisko called *Att Korsa Den Flod Som Kommer Att Dränka Oss Alla* ('to cross the river that will drown us all'). Ättestupa is a very Swedish band that I always associate with Swedish folk music, a very new type of folk music but still with a very rural feel to it. I see a kinship with the Belgium funeral folk scene, with bands like Sylvester Anfang and, especially, Hellvete, who also had a release on Abisko. On *Att Korsa...*, Ättestupa is moving away from their more song-oriented sound for a more free floating style, but without losing their identity.

Dead Letters Spell Out Dead Words Facelessness Erases Every Trace of Humanity [When Skies Are Grey WSAG #22] **Schizophrenia is the first thing that springs to mind when I look at *Facelessness*. Thomas Eklund, the mastermind behind Dead Letters Spell Out Dead Words and numerous other pseudonyms, has stated before how much mental illness has been a driving force behind his music. On the cover is a man without a face and the scribbling on the wall comes off like a combination of Dr. Orlof and Adolph Wölfli.**

***Facelessness* is a drone, but like all good drones, it is not a monotone one. Instead, there are things happening beneath the surface that keeps everything evolving and engaging, and even when Side A mutates into a Post-Punk influenced song, it doesn't even seem odd; it just seems fit and natural. In that final moment of Side A, there is a strong resemblance to another Swedish group, Omala, whose classic debut LP, *Germ*, is sadly neglected these days.**

Trepaneringsritualen Ritualer, Blot och Botgöring [Harsh Head Rituals]
***Ritualer, Blot och Botgöring* is the debut tape from Trepaneringsritualen and so far the only release from them except for a contribution to the seminal *White Nights* box and *Sub Gothenburg* compilation, but if everyone just did one tape a year with this quality, I would be more than happy.**

This actually sounds like what I thought that Metgumbnerbone would sound like when I first read about them in Force Mental. It is dark and evolving, but without falling into the obvious traps of down pitched choirs and bells. The soundtrack for occult rites and grave robbing.

The Female Race [Gothenburg Blood Cult 007]
I guess this is a one-off, but that doesn't really matter as long it is good. The Blood Cult has released a string of really good tapes from the Swedish Post-Mortem (2) **scene. Bands like Vårtgård, ochu, and Maniac Cop have all released possibly their greatest tapes on Gothenburg Blood Cult.**

The Female Race is so gritty and depressing it is barely endurable. There is seldom I feel the need for a shower after listening to a tape, but Female Race gives me that urge.

The Female Race comes in somewhere between Treriksröset and White, but with a more misogynist touch. Maybe it is a divorce tape...

Footnotes:

(1) Utmarken is a small, claustrophobic old car repair shop that now holds some of the best live shows in Sweden.

(2) Post-Mortem is a rather stupid term, but since Power Electronics has been so codified into meaning certain things (i.e. you have to deal with sex/violence/porn), I find that term needlessly narrow. Much like when the term was coined in Sweden in the '80s, its purpose was to give a genre name to all the other bands that weren't exactly like Whitehouse, but still worked in a similar vein.

Jonas Kellagher published the magazine Soma throughout the '90s, and he is one of the three wise guys behind the Segerhuva label based in Stockholm, Sweden.

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Masonna. Osaka. 2009

MASONNA'S BEST

BY C. SPENCER YEH

MASONNA
The Passion of Rubbers 2xC10
G.R.O.S.S. / GRS-108 (Edition of 144 copies), 1995

The question of what's one's favorite item from their collection (or accumulation) consistently pops up in conversation amongst fans and collectors, and this unquestionably is always my answer. From head-to-toe, insert-to-tape, all elements are in glorious harmony and conversation with one another. Having the G.R.O.S.S. label's 'industrial design' fetish/obsession (some would say a relatively antiseptic departure from much of the other noise tapes of the time) articulating the sexualized rubber/bondage theme is a fantastic intersection, and one, to my knowledge, not touched upon again as overtly by the label (the subtle rope-play of *The Three Temples* excluded). The presentation truly is the content, and vice-versa; a unique trait in the young but deep legacy of Noise tape packaging. I marvel at the object's concrete refined sense of pruriency — the particular choice of patterned rubber material, the ornamental silver, the crude claw of staples holding the fucker together — all without resorting to pre-fabricated means (for example Dildo & The Dildoes releasing a tape hanging from a vibrator or something). Every time I've slowly and carefully undone the buckle, heard the crack of the Velcro, pried the rubber shell open, and later meticulously sealed up its intricacies once I'm finished, the process has felt like nothing less than ritual.

Moving on to the actual tapes themselves — double C10 — another perfect choice; four parts of 'acidtronics' — a concise statement forced by physical circumstance. I've always been a sucker for increments of twenty minutes on cassettes (in this case, the total program being twenty), as well as short tapes, maybe because they focus on what truly matters — how the 'side flip' is handled; a similarity with others' obsessions with 7-inch singles. Parts One, Two, and Four offer 'live takes,' uncut and ramming full-speed, differing from the intense cut-up techniques reported on other studio efforts from the time period; just organic velocity. A fucking monolithic vacuum cleaner sucking up all bullshit 'good times' posturing, headbands and peace signs, and blowing them into a rubber isolation suit filled with sex gas so that one can truly get deep and 'well-acquainted' with the finer onanistic details. The third part/side is a relative anomaly, a marked contrast — echoed out spacious synth bells — the tense and the delicate sharing opposite sides of the same space as the brutish and primal. Simple but effective sequencing; a crucial piece that lays bare all intentions behind the churning sonic mass surrounding. Taken inside as a whole, the four sides shape a massively pleasing and dynamic curve. Absolutely 'psych' — psychosexual and psychedelic. A++, five stars, two thumbs up, four spurting cocks and all that.

C. Spencer Yeh works both under his own name and with his project Burning Star Core and runs the Drone-Disco and What The..? labels. He recently relocated to Brooklyn, New York from Cincinnati, Ohio.

THE POLITICS OF HNW

THE ROOTS OF WALL-RIDING

BY SAM MCKINLAY

Wall Noise:
A massive, seemingly unchanging harsh noise 'wall' of electronic distortion, crunch, and rumble. "Powerful minimalist deconstruction of the harsh noise object."

In the last few years, one topic of debate within the harsh noise world has been the defining factors that have built up around what is now known as the sub-genre 'Wall Noise.' Power Electronics discussion used to dominate areas of disagreement, contrast, and arguments over stylization and content, but as of late, I have witnessed even longer, more in-depth discussions/arguments over the tonal qualities and supposed purpose of Wall Noise. This facet of harsh noise has been met with violent opposition from some artists, as the tonal statements it presents can put some people over the edge. Wall Noise is seen as a threat to some, as it can disregard themes that some harsh noise fans feel need to be infused in harsh noise, such as drama, story, entertainment, etc. But does Wall Noise actually ignore the standards that previous harsh noise classics have achieved? Is the motivation behind this style of noise completely different, or is Wall Noise part of a healthy and creative growth pattern of Harsh Noise that simply carries the form to extremes for fans of heavy noise?

Before we get into this further, I should discuss in plain English the developments of Wall Noise over the years. Sound artists have obviously meditated over themes of minimalism in tones and 'noise' for the last century. Even a cursory overview ranges from the Futurists' examples of violent engine sounds, to Philip Corner and his 1962 work 'Black Hole' (from *Oracle, an electronic cantata on images of war: strike week version* — a piece which scarily sounds a lot like contemporary Wall Noise works), to LaMonte Young's minimalism, the immense volume and snapping violence of Zbigniew Karkowski, Francisco Lopez and his soaring works, all the way through to something like the minimal and quiet works of Bernhard Günter. The range of noise study is long and surely accomplished, some works being examples of noise for noise's sake, and others acting as examples of stages of tonal and sound study, as an artist like Chop Shop would display in his levels of study and experimentation. The academia behind the works of sound artists of the past century plays a critical role in the establishment of Harsh Noise into the late 1970s, '80s and '90s, as projects like Merzbow, Hijokaidan, The Haters, Incapacitants, etc. took form with acute knowledge of the past techniques and ideologies. But Wall Noise took a very different path of influence and workmanship, which is one of the most important aspects of the sub-genre. Rather than from sound art, Wall Noise has grown from the roots, sound, and mania of the 1990s 'Americanoise' culture.

First of all, in subtle contradiction of what was just stated above, Wall Noise is nothing new. It has indeed taken some forms of harsh noise to new levels of study and heavy interest, but most wall noise artists take their influence from very defined past works. Japanese harsh noise obviously has its prime examples of massive cascading walls of noise with projects like Hijokaidan, Incapacitants, and Monde Bruits, each taking different aspects of harsh noise generation and layering them into mountains of sound. To a lesser extent, Merzbow's stylizations can be evaluated with many of his studio works, but his live works have been focused in the past on massive layers of continual sound. The Japanese had a major influence on the harsh noise movements of North America (for those not already acquainted with something like The Haters or early U.K. Industrial projects) in the 1990s, perpetuating the popularity of American projects like Macronympha, Skin Crime, Richard Ramirez, Black Leather Jesus, Taint, etc. Something that one notices almost immediately about 'Americanoise' (the term used initially to describe the heavy and dark distortion-laden Mother Savage Noise Productions cassette compilation from 1995, and then used frequently to describe the North American harsh noise style of the 1990s) is the style, the sound. American harsh noise back in the 1990s was noticeably dirtier, concentrating on the crunch and rumble a lot more than the squeal and jolts of some Japanese artists with their cleaner feel. American harsh noise was representative of something a little meaner and more dangerous, and this instigated a new way of interpreting the harsh noise form of the time. The culmination of this 'sound' can be heard in Joe Roemer's (Macronympha) side project OVMN, which stands for 'Optimum Volume Maximum Noise.' OVMN is a virtual avalanche of harsh noise that is purposely the harshest possible, culminating in massive walls of sound while representing the American noise ideal with its grit and darkness. Contemporary Wall Noise artists are the children of the 1990s Americanoise, with a strong interest in the characteristics of the genre as a whole. The Incapacitants and crustier Japanese acts such as Cracksteel and MO*TE are also driving influences, but it's the cassette culture and sadism of the North American sound that you can really hear in the heavy distortion lines of modern Wall Noise artists.

The American project Skin Crime was/is also at the forefront of the US harsh noise style. With varying source manipulation, violence, heavy building and crashing, Skin Crime has an amazing feel for the dynamics to be found within full areas of harsh sound. Patrick O'Neil of Skin Crime was one of the first of four people to whom I posed the following question:

"When you work with a static tone, or an 'unmoving' or even swelling/moving textural line of noise, how do you contemplate the spaces and 'dynamics' that lay within the bits and pieces that are concentrated to achieve the so-called 'white noise'? Along with your work with the different movements and breaks in your tracks, what, to you, is the driving quality and endearment of the 'static' or 'crunch' that you strive for and appreciate?"

PATRICK O'NEIL / SKIN CRIME:

"Usually when I record, I try and listen to what the other people I'm playing with are doing, and the sounds I make are a response to what they are doing. Sometimes it's not the sound itself, but the results of the sound breaking down when being overloaded with too much information; the conflicting signals overload each other. The results are the broken remains of the sounds more so then the actual sounds being fed into the mix. It's hard for me to put into words my methods because a lot of what I do is a reaction to what's going on, rather than a conscious decision on my part.

A lot of the reason why most of the Skin Crime material is recorded live is that it gives the sounds a lot more freedom to take on a life of their own, whereas doing things in a studio or multi-tracked things are more rigid and controlled. Most of the time we don't plan anything out, we don't say 'this part is going to be loud' or 'let's do a more quiet track,' things just come together on their own. Also, a lot can depend on who I'm playing with at the time, because each person has their own methods/sounds, and the sounds I'm going to be making and using will differ from person to person."

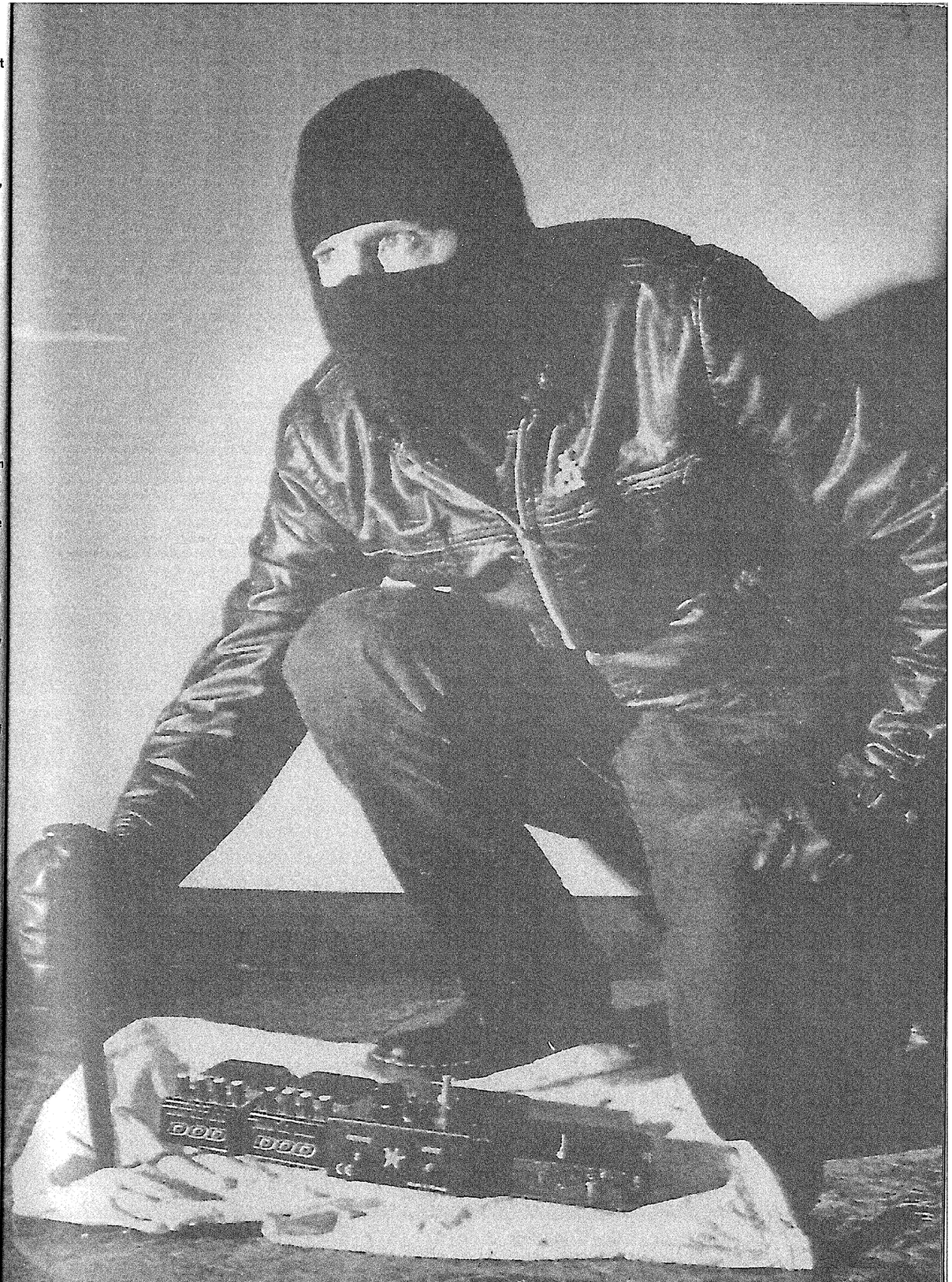
Patrick's descriptors indeed fit with the sound that is evident in his pieces. Patrick doesn't think of himself as a 'Wall' artist, but the harsh noise techniques and results that he produces with Skin Crime are among the most crucial inspirations and models for a lot of the Wall Noise ideology, taking from the 'overloaded' mountain of sound that he can generate and the logistics behind the tower of violence that he builds and deconstructs.

One of the most important artists to influence the styles and constructions of the contemporary Wall Noise artist is Richard Ramirez. Richard's dedication to the frequent tones and crackles of the harsh noise object is astounding. All one has to do is listen first to the 1993/1994 release *A.N.T.I.*, and then to a very recent release of his side projects Crash at Every Speed or Werewolf Jerusalem, and one will see that the changes in the crackling and crumbling are subtle, but also powerfully different in their study, focus, and dedication. Richard's project Werewolf Jerusalem made very major steps in the Wall Noise sub-genre, as it forced harsh noise listeners to contemplate the violent act of crackling and crumbling distortion as an act of drone, or 'static drone,' as Richard would describe it. This is very exciting, as now-classic visions of electronic 'harsh' noise purity are put to the test, the air between the crackles of static put to the magnifying glass; the power is apparent in the sound shifts and layered cuts. The sound isn't 'intense' and violent per se, but the sounds and tones are made up of the same features of violent Americanoise, but with a strong motive of minimalist deconstruction.

RICHARD RAMIREZ / WEREWOLF JERUSALEM:

"My work *(WEREWOLF JERUSALEM)* is to take old radios (from the '70s/early '80s) and abuse them to the fullest. I push the volume to a complete buzz sound. I sometimes drop the distortion level to give just a hiss sound or airy feel to the pieces. Then I'll return the levels to the highest distorted possibilities. The 'crunch' sound simply comes from a certain radio that I use. It is an old sports radio that I got as a child. It gives it that crunch sound. It always feels like it is on the brink of being destroyed. I also used to toy around with blown speakers. I would mic them facing each other. This would create a feedback that would also give a crackling sound to my pieces. My main effects are distortion, delay, & reverb. My set up is very minimal and basic, but I feel it gives my work its signature sound.

I like the subtle movements in texture in some 'Wall' compositions. It does not have to be chaotic, and it does not have to be a bore. I listen to the piece that I am working on at the time as a whole; the changes do not always occur during the initial recording. Most of the time it does. Most of my work is done in one take. I am not a perfectionist in any way. Sometimes I'll go back and rework an area by simply running it through my equipment again and making changes were I see fit. I enjoy the density of some noise works because it creates a mood for me. It's relaxing. I do listen to pieces that



go on for a lengthy period of time. I don't get bored with it. I tend to get bored with the more chaotic/dynamic works than the 'Wall' pieces, but that's just personal taste."

Again, Richard's longtime focus on the qualities of crackle, static, and distortion is unfathomable. The subtleties he can generate are even more appreciated when one has the opportunity to listen to a large quantity of his noise releases, not unlike staring at paintings by the minimalist artist Ad Reinhardt. His two paintings, **ABSTRACT PAINTING NO. 5, 1962** (1962), and **ABSTRACT PAINTING, NUMBER 33** (1963) are very alike in their dark squares against darker areas of space, but the subtle differences create the violent shift and the power behind the studies/paintings. Richard's works are reflected in some of the more extreme contemporary Wall Noise artists, such as Vomir (France) and Taskmaster (Canada), as they rely on subtle shifts and changes over solid blocks of sound to achieve the essences of the works. Important also is the texture of the work that Ramirez intensifies with his noise pieces as the air between the crackles and static can also create the inner dynamic of the noise being generated — whether the harsh noise is moving or not, the air in the 'crackle' spaces is the violence of the recording. The violence that is apparent is growing from the roots of the same dirty and crumbled crust harsh noise of the 1990s, but with a magnifying glass — for some, a study to determine why we even like these sounds.

Skin Crime and Richard Ramirez are still at work today, but there are obviously more contemporary noise artists that reflect the style of Wall Noise and are the primary result of much of the rampant discussion regarding the subject and its tendencies. One of the best of the contemporary harsh noise artists that you can describe as Wall Noise is Pat Yankee and his project Paranoid Time. Paranoid Time material is harsh and violent, but still carries the primary stylizations that are studied by the likes of Ramirez, as Paranoid Time's sound is heavily saturated with suffocating abrasive crackle. The overwhelming sound that is generated by Pat's chain of Pro Co RAT pedals (if that wasn't cool enough) is a cacophony of distorted sounds and sources that gel into a mountain of heavily scratched and cut distortion, all the while having some variance and shifts that create violent and fearful cliffs for the listener.

PAT YANKEE / PARANOID TIME:

"When dropping a large static log, I find that the spaces and dynamics lurking about the crunch pile will often take care of themselves without a lot of pre-planning on my part. I put trust in, and lay responsibility upon, the Process. Randomness and chance up to a point, right? That being said, it is important to initiate the Process with a carefully cultivated batch of sound sources. For Paranoid Time, that often means making use of recordings that feature dynamic clacking machines in their natural settings. Sometimes that means placing 20 plastic Harding's bags into a grocery sack with a mic and working that out for a half hour or so. Whatever the fuck works. I know the RATs will do their job in the end, but I have to feed them the right cheese.

Some of my earliest memories involve feelings, sensations I would get while just sitting or laying somewhere, zoning-out in kid world. I used to be able to do this thing with my brain where it felt like I had ants crawling all over the inside of my head. A real, physical sensation of thousands and thousands of those things scooting all over, under my skull and across my lobes. It was soothing. They also made a sound...like a sharp crinkley crackley with loud pops and snaps, kind of like a campfire, but in 4-D and LOUD. Man, I haven't gotten anywhere near that yet, but you know who has? Hum of the Druid, that's who."

The notion of 'static drone' (a term mentioned earlier) is apparent in Pat's words above. His concentration on the overwhelming sound is the main focal point of his work, causing the overall sensation of being almost hypnotized by the vicious wall of distortion. The sense of being overwhelmed by harsh noise was one of the original goals of some of the 1980s and 1990s artists: create such a high-volume wall of white noise and sound that the listener (and in most cases the artist as well) goes from cognitive interest to just staring blankly into space, physically overwhelmed.

Pat also mentioned the noise project Hum of the Druid, artist Eric Stonefelt. Hum of the Druid mixes different forms of harsh noise techniques, such as building, deconstructing, and shocking violence. But Eric also has a keen sense of fear in his noise, almost always carried out with an incredibly organic feel to the sounds. Listening to a Hum of the Druid piece is like running through a dry forest, listening to the insects scampering and the sticks cracking underfoot, but all of a sudden you step over a cliff, roll down with the rocks and boulders that pulled free, eventually landing in a different area of the forest that is on fire. There are definitely subtle and not so subtle changes and drama in the works, but all make use of techniques and tonal qualities of crumbling Americanoise that have been mentioned above. Eric's works have a gritty and fearful tendency afforded by harsh noise and its capabilities via 'Wall,' deconstruction, and otherwise that not many can accomplish, due to his microscopic tonal/crackle fascination and how they can meld and also fall apart.

ERIC STONEFELT / HUM OF THE DRUID:

"Whether a sound is monotonous or fully dynamic, I expect the result to have a natural quality. Effective crunch and cracking is suggestive of some sort of organic movement or acoustic presence. Even if the source is entirely electronic and the goal is something mechanical or industrialized, I'd hope to hear some natural space, or at least some form of soundscape, no matter how abrasive the aesthetic. Static in these forms of music can be cheap and not like the white noise of reality, so while my recordings should always be surreal and removed in some way, I don't usually like to hear anything that has too linear a relationship to its own limited means. It's more interesting for me to hear how different timbres relate, each with their own nuances and texture, than it is to listen to a microscopic study of only one source, though that study is of course an important part of the recording process. Similarly to 'traditional music,' as if that term means anything, you should be able to appreciate the individual components, as well as the collective meshing that is the larger sound or 'song'."

It's obvious that Hum of the Druid is not pure Wall Noise, but I think that Eric's sensibilities toward the harsh noise object are examples of what make up the foundation of Wall Noise's fascination with layered and deconstructed tonal and crackle qualities. The essences of what Eric looks at within his works are the same qualities that a focused Wall artist will look for in the varying forms of heavy static; how they can manipulate each other or how they can be studied as their own whole.

Some people are scared by the possibility that Harsh Noise is falling into too many sub-genres, and that a sense of freedom and creativity is being lost within the genre manipulation. Wall Noise is one of the genres that has perpetuated this belief, just as many contemporary Harsh Noise artists have taken the root of focused and pure harsh noise. What I see in the contemporary focused and linear movements of Harsh Noise (and Power Electronics, for that matter) is contemporary Harsh Noise REALLY looking at the qualities and interior motives of the harsh noise entity by studying and evaluating what they are obsessed with within the scope of the genres. The blanketing term 'Harsh Noise Walls' (HNW) has become such an entity that there are many contemporary projects that are focused primarily on the slightly shifting or unchanging walls of noise; embracing the inherent thematics behind the sounds, which include anything from heavily antisocial tendencies to dark neorealist semantics. The immediate tendency from some fans of Harsh Noise it to dismiss the qualities of some of the projects due to the seemingly confined 'regulations' that drive the noise, but many of the projects are, again, a sincere magnification of the vicious details of Harsh Noise and how the different manipulations of texture can further shift the tendencies of the sound. Some recently recognized artists that come to mind that exemplify the contemporary qualities mentioned above include Remlap, The Slasher is the Sex Maniac, Infirmary, Indch libertine, Griz+zlor, Tissa Mawartyassari, side projects from the mind of Richard Ramirez such as the amazing An Innocent Young Throat-Cutter (a project whose first release was in 1994, but escalated in popularity after its more recent releases in the realm of highly textured HNW), and many more. Wall Noise is the 'bastard son' of the 1990s cassette-era style, where an artist will listen to anything from a MO*TE, Monde Bruits, MXM, or Macronympha release all the way over to a work by David Gilden, Taint, or Sickness, enjoying the different qualities of the works, and then trying to understand them, tear them apart, rebuilding the pieces as they see fit, or staring into their already inherent qualities. Not unlike painting, 1990s Harsh Noise is to Abstract Expressionism as contemporary Wall Noise is to Minimalism -- two very strong creative entities that are both parts of development and both concerned with the power that can be achieved with the sheer strength of harsh noise and its variances.

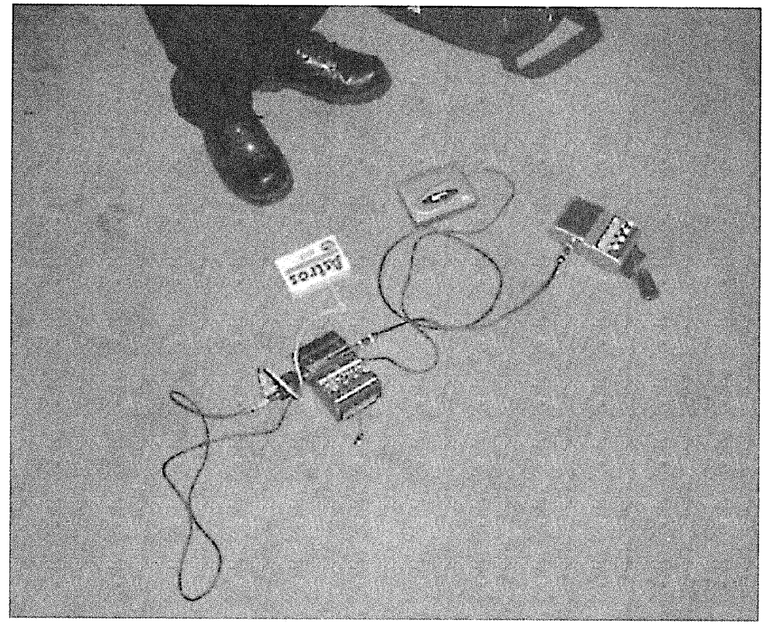
"I think it's safe to say, you can never have enough Militant Walls. Unvarnished harsh purity. Mass of unrelenting, whole brain consumption. First order filth. Call it what you want. This is noise as it was always meant to be." **- Jason Soddy/TADM**

• SELECTED PLAYLIST •

Classic/1990s:
INCAPACITANTS - Operorue (Kubitsuri Tapes, CD, 1995)
BLACK LEATHER JESUS - A.N.T.I. (Deadline Noise Recordings, cs, 1993/1994; CDr reissue, 2006)
TAINT - Victimology (Taint Entertainment,cs, 1997)
MXM - Flesh-Biting Pedophile (Mother Savage Noise Productions, cs, 1995)
OVMN - Throbbing Pulse (SE Productions, cs, 1996)
MONDE BRUITS - Portuguese Man-Of-War (Vanilla Records, one-sided cs, 1991)
SKIN CRIME - Urge (Bloodlust!, cs, 1996; Self Abuse Records, CDr reissue, 2004)
MERZBOW - Great American Nude/Crash for Hi-Fi (Alchemy Records, CD, 1991)
DEAD BODY LOVE - Low-Fi Power Carnage (Old Europa Café, cs, 1995; Militant Walls/PACrec, CD reissue, 2007)
HIJOKAIDAN - Ferocity of Practical Life (Fourth Dimension Records, 10-inch, 1997)

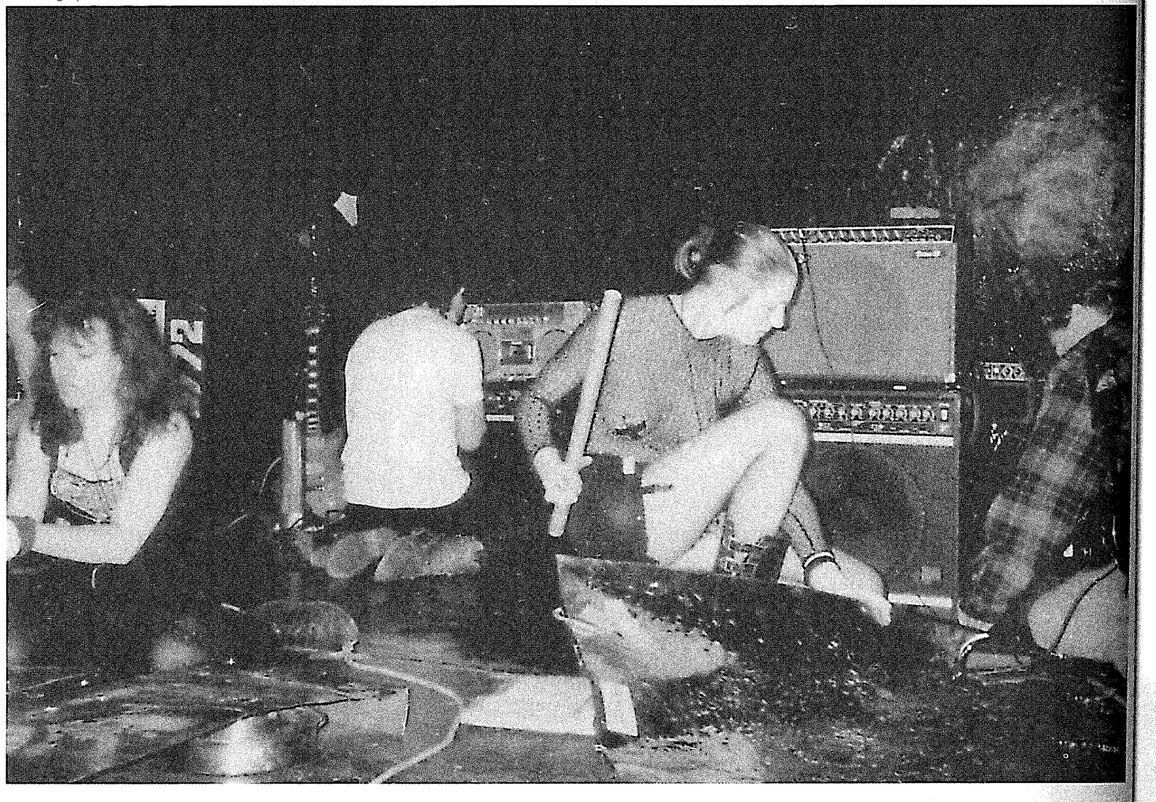
Contemporary/2000s:
THE CHERRY POINT - Night of the Bloody Tapes (Troniks, CD, 2005)
WEREWOLF JERUSALEM - Music for Mass Radio (Monorail Trespassing, 2 x cs, 2004)
KNIVES - Switchblade Princess (Troniks, one-sided 7-inch, 2005)
BLACK AIR - Plague Ritual (Dada Drumming/Iatrogenesis Records/Militant Walls/Rundownsun, 1-sided LP, 2006)
TASKMASTER - Swamp Lurker (Troniks, 1-sided LP, 2006)
SEWER ELECTION + TRERIKSRÖSET - The Killing Sessions (Troniks/Chondritic Sound, CD, 2007)
HUM OF THE DRUID - Societal (SNSE, LP, 2005)
TOTAL SLITTING OF THROATS (Militant Walls, CDr, 2005; Troniks/PACrec, CD reissue, 2007)
PARANOID TIME - 4:20 Brother (Tapeworm Tapes, cs, 2005)
VOMIR - Living Dead Noise (Maisonbruit, CDr 2006)

Sam McKinlay is responsible for harsh noise project The Rita, as well as PE-themed outfit BT.HN. His manifestoes, as well as his CDr labels Militant Walls (not defunct) and Lake Shark Harsh Noise are widely regarded as galvanizing influences in the growth of HNW.



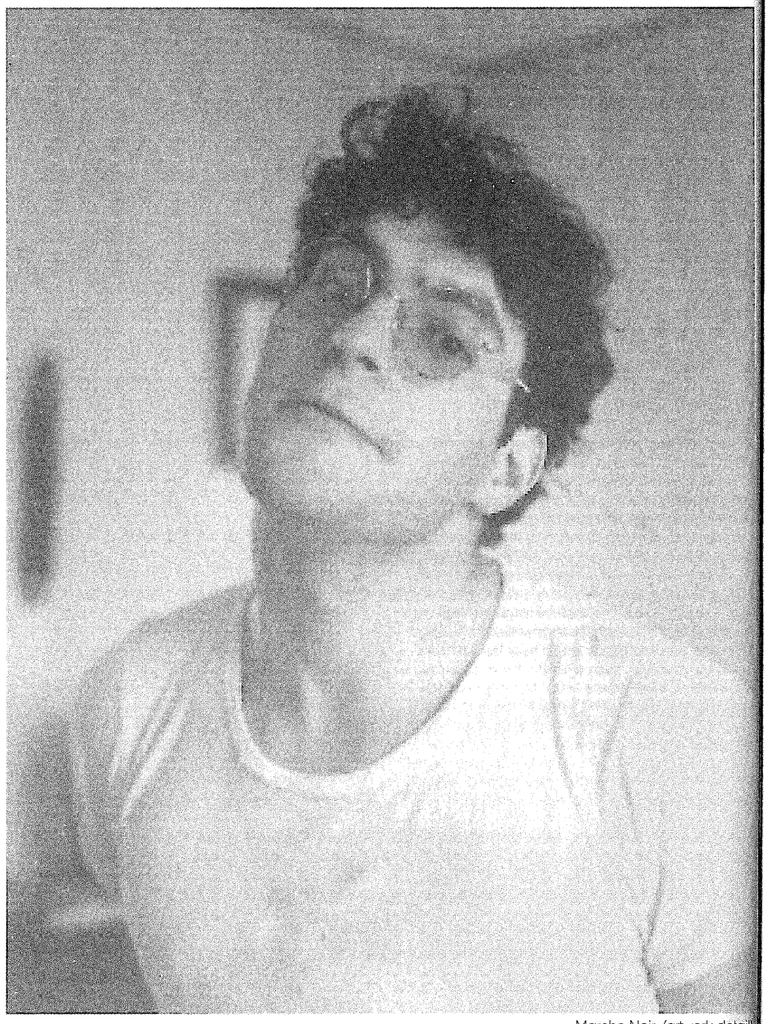
Werewolf Jerusalem. 2010

Macronympha. 1992



ZONE NORD

SIX MANIFESTATIONS OF
INDUSTRIAL PERFECTION
BY CHRIS SIENKO



Marche Noir. (artwork detail)

AS LOUD AS POSSIBLE: **When did you start recording or performing as Zone Nord?**

JEAN-LUC ANGLES, ZONE NORD (ZN): **About 1990.**

It's probably true of any music genre with a long history and a fetish for its own past, but it's particularly true in noise: the fanatics love to talk about the ones that got away, whether it's the great projects that never made good on their initial promise, or the ones who shone for a few brief recordings and then vanished back into the working/partying/dying world. Add booze to any post-show chat, and talk will eventually turn to the short-term wonders. Whatever happened to Building of Gel? Why are there only a handful of Blister Pack tapes? Did you hear Bob Marinelli's in a blues band now? How did Flutter get away without ever doing a full-length? There's such a premium put on producing, and, more importantly, on sticking it out for the duration, that it always seems a little scandalous to see some projects flame out quickly, especially when they were so damn great. Take, for example, Jean-Luc Angles of Zone Nord.

Zone Nord's output is miniscule by modern noise standards, yet it seems both prescient and tightly coiled, bursting with ideas, directions, and approaches — it's astonishing to think that the same person who created ZN's first record also made the last, given their radically contrasting frameworks and approaches. At the same time, Angles' guiding hand is apparent throughout each release, and, as with all of the best noise practitioners for the ages, Zone Nord's approach, feel, and technique is his alone...nobody has ever sounded like this, and, strangely, few have really even tried. Why is that? Perhaps it's the strange, fumbling atmosphere he sometimes evokes, though the jaw-clenching obscurity of some of his best works is probably a greater factor.

The ZN sound is the sound of true searching, not being afraid to put himself into uncomfortable spaces, not allowing technique or flash to free him from the corners into which he has painted himself. He evokes the morbid, bed-ridden loathing of M.B. (not to mention the Slaughter Productions/Skeletone stable of bands that progressed the post-mortem art form) and the more monolithic projects of the Broken Flag stable without aping anyone. And then, suddenly, it all changed for his final record, as Jean-Luc Angles reinvented himself as a sleek, detailed, nuanced cybernaut, abandoning his low-fidelity crud-wave sound for digital elegance and exquisite processing. Until one day...poof! Gone.

In short, Zone Nord is an enigma...he rode into town, plopped six near-perfect releases (five full-lengths and a collaboration track) into our lap, and rode out without so much as a parting word — until now. I managed to eke a few words out of Mr. Angles, who was gracious enough to provide a little contextual detail about this project's short-lived existence.

"Absolutely and without question the single most underrated unit on the planet.

Ahem. Apologies for the redundancy of the term "underrated" - invisible is probably a better word here, and a self-perpetuated invisibility at that. The versatility of this project is almost as mind-blowing as the excellence displayed in each ventured pursuit." **- J. Soddy, aka TADM, another rabid Zone Nord admirer**

ARTIFACT #1: Marche Noir/Denrees Diverses LP (self-released, 1993 — edition of 286 copies, out of print)

ALAP: **What caused you to make your debut release an LP record? Was this record self-released? Did you distribute the LP yourself?**

ZN: **I wanted to see if it was possible to realise it by myself (with no professional studio, no record company, no big money). It was self-released and self-distributed.**

ALAP: **Is that a picture of you on the LP cover? If not, who is it? What is the image on the back cover?**

ZN: **No, it was a friend of mine. The back cover was a blurry conceptual image.**

The mysteriously decorated and flimsy album cover immediately suggests something strange and far removed from civilization. The first thing we see are the eyes of a grimacing, nattily-dressed lunatic on the cover, with only the words "Zone Nord" above the picture serving as identification, or information of any kind. The back cover, which looks like a picture of squishy alien head, offers no further clues. The LP title comes from its two side-long tracks ("Marche Noir" = side One; "Denrees Diverses" = side Two). My copy of Side One has its artist credit covered over with a gray sticker, further obscuring its creator! (Side Two's sticker was removed, showing that the record label below reads "ANGLES, Jean-Luc.") SACEM info is given, but nothing else.

"Marche Noir" sharpens and modernizes the sound of early '80s Industrial depression, honing the edges without indulging in the early-'90s Japanese noise overload model that would soon become standard operating procedure for so many. The burning synth loops are overlaid with rough, crumbling noise of the sort we now associate with Hum of the Druid or Werewolf Jerusalem — physical, porous, and biting. The tracks move simultaneously at two speeds — the synth lines stay in simple rhythmic patterns, while the textured overlays fall in and out of sync like a wobbly cog on a decrepit drill-press. Remember all that talk years ago about how Merzbow's strengths come from his background as a drummer, and how his noise reflected a drummer's sensibility? It's hard to say whether Angles was ever rhythmically inclined, but this recording plays a trick that only those with a very complex sense of rhythm can pull off — it manages to be rhythmic and arrhythmic simultaneously. The grinding, textured sounds sometimes follow the synth lines precisely, but then unspool and drift away at inexact intervals, preventing the rhythmically obvious drum-circle-jerk moves that turned some early Industrial exponents into simpleminded Burning Men with more triplets than brains. This intentional sabotage of forward momentum and revoking of easy "comfortable" listening patterns recurs throughout and informs all of Zone Nord's work.

The "Denrees Diverses" side offers more surprises, with some slowed voice tapes accenting the synths, evoking a master-computer that has burned out all but its most rudimentary synapses years ago, and is coasting on a handful of electrons. The two tracks that end this side predate the solo works of Graham Lambkin, prefiguring his fully inhospitable landscapes of the human voice by a full ten years. Not harsh enough to be harsh noise, not monotonous enough to be early Industrial, too monotonous to be Musique Concrete, Zone Nord's debut stamps its foot into the sand and refuses to budge from its obscure position. It's standing there to its day, offering a unique vantage point to anyone that can track down its rarefied location (translation: this is a rare-ass album. Get out your wallet, or hope for a secret download to surface).

ARTIFACT #2: Roferon A CD (PURE, 1994, reissued on RRR after 2000 — open edition, in print)

ALAP: **The Roferon A CD (RRR/PURE) has an interesting tone to it - compared to the debut LP, it sounds much rougher, muddier, and more obscure, like it was dug out of a tar pit. Can you tell me a little about the change in tone from the first album to the second?**

ZN: **First: New instruments (samplers, Atari computer). Second: More influences by noise and industrial bands.**

"When I first heard the Zone Nord LP, my first thought was that this was what I had imagined M.B. to sound like when I first heard about him, but before I had heard his work." **- Ron Lessard, RRRecords**

It's hard to listen to this sophomore release without thinking of Lester Bangs' review of the second (imaginary) Count Five album, *Carburetor Dung*. Bangs, after weaving an elaborate (and realistic) myth suggesting that the band had spit out one garage-punk masterpiece *(Psychotic Reaction)* before evolving into some sort of grandiose classical-prog powerhouse with a full-time glockenspiel player, noted that the follow-up to the debut "was so grungy that on most of the songs you could barely even distinguish anything except an undifferentiated wall of grinding noise and intermittent punctuation of glottal sowlike gruntings." (Psychotic Reactions & Carburetor Dung, pg. 17)

That album may have never actually existed (prove me wrong, please?), but this one does, and it sounds exactly like the passage above. Roferon A starts out skuzzy and indistinct, and before long, it sinks even lower, wallowing in a depressive murk, decomposing before your eyes, until all that remains by the final track are chunks of undigested mucilage floating in a pool of stomach fluid. Track five, in particular, sounds like an endlessly-ebbing tide of animal decomposition, bubbling up to shore, acrid gas bubbles popping, muck receding, the whole thing devoid of progression, roiling endlessly, a testament to entropy — even M.B.'s most monotonous works sound like Rick Wakeman in comparison!
This record is desolate, bankrupt, and surreal, but surreal in the way that walking alone in an abandoned part of town in the middle of the night is surreal, as your mind, out of its safety zone, carves scenarios and mythologies out of the landscape, imagining fearsome events that might have taken place here while slowed or stopped factory machines seem ready to spring to life and hordes of CHUDS could be ready to leap out of every manhole.

Some records are crazy because they're made by stable people trying to make the craziest thing imaginable, and it just comes off sort of nutty, or worse, "zany." *Roferon A* slowly treads its path of strange solitude with gravitas, unafraid to take the least desirable path to its miserable conclusion. Even by noise standards, this record is uncomfortable and not fun. In other words, it's absolutely perfect, essential, and the best thing you haven't heard this year.

ARTIFACT #3: - RRRecycled cassette (RRRecords, release date unknown — open edition, in print)

ALAP: **Was the RRRecycled cassette indented as a discrete album? Did you release any other music on cassette?**

ZN: **No, it was a tape sent to Ron Lessard and it was his idea. No other tapes.**

Despite the militantly midrange-heavy fidelity (custom-dulled for tape medium, and only slightly clearer than Roferon A), this is the most accessible and varied Zone Nord release yet, and one of the best — a reversal of the standard noise-classic scenario in that it's in print and costs $4 plus shipping, as opposed to the usual situation where the best albums by many older projects were limited to 50 copies and released 15 years ago. Side one is fully rhythmic and outright second-wave "Industrial," with a boot-on-concrete sternness that suggests Esplendor Geometrico, or maybe early SPK without vocals, a crackly, tinny, shortwave-fidelity sound that can't entirely be blamed on/attributed to the tape medium. Angles utilizes all manner of rhythmic tricks which we think of as very modern — the way the noise swaths shift in and out of sequence with the throbbing synth patterns reminds me of Mammal. Side two gets grainier, more abstract, and sometimes resembles the soundtrack to an obscure science fiction film circa 1952, with long trails of delay streaking like lonely homing beacons into the remorseless depths of space. At 60 minutes, though, you do start to feel like you've heard it all before, as certain "tricks" repeat themselves again and again. Even when these tricks are apparent, though, the audio is still engaging — this is one of the most "fun" Zone Nord albums to listen to, and the dead opposite of the controlled tedium of *Roferon A*. As each release is so different from the others, it's easy to spoil yourself into thinking that every second must to be revelatory and completely new, but it's not so; sometimes it's alright to get carried along. Besides, the tape is smart enough to be frontloaded with all the best tracks on side one, so you can just keep going until you get bored. The narrative here is all galactic battle-cruisers and grimy racing vehicles, all of them clogged with gunk and disrepair, but still very fast.

ARTIFACT #4: [unintelligible title - see below] CD (Les Disques Bruitistes, release date unknown — limited edition, out of print)

ALAP: **The self-titled (?) release on Les Disques Bruitistes [F. Douris' label in the '90s] is an unusual release - amidst all the mechanized sounds and industrial atmosphere, there is a rising and falling flanger (or is it an oscillator?) sound that underlies nearly every second of the album. Can you tell me more about the creation of this recording?**

ZN: **The title of this record is a title on Arabian language. About instruments: I've got a JV-80 synth by Roland and I used the internal effects of this machine.**

Here's a one-hour tour inside the rustiest, filthiest, most brittle factory you can imagine, buffed up to a pockmarked aluminum gleam. Like a steel sculpture that is overlaid with corrugated tin, wrapped with copper mesh and then coiled in barbed wire, this album is textured, layered, metallic in ten different ways, and, ultimately, hard to penetrate. The six tracks unfold over an hour and are monolithic and monotonous, with full five-minute stretches where the instruments seem to be slowly interacting with their own feedback systems, untouched by human intervention (emphasis on SLOWLY). Strange tricks keep you on your toes, though; the rising and falling of the flanger (or oscillator) that dominates nearly EVERY track, is insane. Rising and falling, rising and falling, rising and falling, it's an effect set in motion and then ignored, yet it never stops and never modulates. Why is it here? More precisely, why is it EVERYWHERE!? The industrial hum of the record can get so lulling at times, it's easy to tune out, until either dead silence jars you back to recognition (there are very noticeable two-second track separations) or moments of fierce action rise up — whether Angles actively intervenes in his processes, or whether the internal feedback systems finally crumble and give way to new shapes is unclear. The tinny, lo-fidelity sound isn't distant and evocative like the PURE disc, instead committing the fatal sin of making you wish you could hear everything more clearly. Despite the relative dullness, it's unique enough to keep you coming back for more clues. (Incidentally, the packaging from Les Disques Bruitistes is sickeningly banal, with the cheapest, ginchiest, no-effort white paper Xerox covers revealing a professionally-printed real CD. It's like taking a fillet mignon and sandwiching it between two slices of Wonder bread!)

ARTIFACT #5: Salbutanol CDr (Tochnit Aleph, 1999 — edition of 100, out of print)

ALAP: **There's a great difference in sound between the Salbutanol CDr (Tochnit Aleph) and the rest of your discography. Had you progressed to a different set of equipment or recording techniques with this**

[unintelligible title]
(Les Disques Bruitistes, CD date unknown)

release, or perhaps a different working method? How much did Daniel Löwenbrück's source material affect the final product?

ZN: **It was a work on an Apple computer with effects and a mixing desk plus synths like the MS-404 by Doepfer. Each record comes from an experimental step and a sound discovery.**

This is the last major statement from Zone Nord, a full six years after the LP debut. Zone Nord pulls a fast one here — with all new equipment at his disposal, and the sonic intervention of this collaboration with Daniel Löwenbrück (it's worth reminding newcomers that at this point, Daniel Löwenbrück had not yet started to explore the Raionbashi sound, and was still better known for laptop-based collage/DJ projects like blackjewishgays and Aleph Empire), the sound changes radically from previous releases. Mr. Angles' mention of the Doepfer 404 is interesting, it being a synth meant to emulate the infamous Roland 303 bass synthesizer (canonized by Acid House producers for its ability to tweak the unholy shit out of bass lines). As such, *Salbutanol* has a bottom end that will test all but the heartiest of speaker systems, with a deep, churning sea of menacing patterns and shapes performing in the lowest registers, a place usually reserved for Moog Rogue solos.

The material on *Salbutanol* is forward-rushing and episodic - characteristics largely unheard of in late-'90s closed-loop computer/laptop recordings. There's a lot more obvious layering and deployment of sounds and textures here, unlike many laptop demonstrations where all sounds tend to operate vertically, moment to moment, without narrative movement. Salbutanol functions horizontally, compositionally, with an opening, a development, and several variations/reversals throughout, ending with a coda that returns to the textures and moods utilized at the top of the piece.

The first ten minutes consist of deep bass patterns and massed choral sweeps, churning like a stretch of ocean with no land in sight in any direction. Soon, these threatening electronics give way and fall out from under us as a succession of static, but exceedingly detailed, electronic clusters begin to grow in their place. High-ends dominate the middle section of the disc — thick, belt-sanding blocks of artificially-constructed white hiss, with distortion applied in a thin and crispy layer, like Tempura batter. Much of this disc composes with absence — not silence, but the selective removal of frequencies. As the bass drops out, certain frequencies are flattened, and the "pleasing" portions of the tonal spectrum drop away as sounds gets more emaciated, more abstract, decreasing in mass while still retaining the same velocity, like a time-lapse of starving single-cell organisms.

Angles attacks Löwenbrück's source sounds with methodical precision, each section of the piece perfectly formed in its way — sometimes monotonous, sometimes engaging, but never discrete; to reiterate, the album is just full of narrative elements, with repeating patterns and unexpected turnarounds that revert to previous default points — think of *TNB Est Mort!*, the way each of the four tracks seems to start with the same sounds before venturing in four completely different directions.

This CDr existed simultaneously with the generally-acknowledged "golden years" of the Mego stable (Pita, Fennesz, General Magic, Hecker all sprouting their heaviest, strongest wings), yet somehow manages to cultivate portions of the digital *tabula rasa* that have not yet been explored by many even a decade later. From his first isolated experiments "influenced by noise and industrial culture" to a final high-tech document that seems to lap its competitors twice over, it's hard not to imagine Angles giving the completed disc a final spin and thinking, "Well, that's as far as I can go."

ALAP: **Have you ever played live? Would your equipment translate well to a live environment, or do you think of Zone Nord only as a studio project?**

ZN: **No live. I've got no live opportunities.**

ARTIFACT #6: "Fenozolozol," a collaboration track with Francois Douris on Douris' Colombe CDr (Solipsism, release date unknown — edition of 100, out of print)

ALAP: **One of your recordings involves collaboration with François Douris. ("Fenozolozol" off of Douris' *Colombe* CDr [Solipsism]) What was your contribution to this recording? Have the two of you collaborated on other occasions?**

ZN: **I have collaborated with F. Douris and Reynols from Argentina on a double CD with the guy from Tochnit Aleph: a remix. No other collaboration. I also tried to work on a techno style.**

ALAP: **Many of your record titles have titles that sound like they might be related to pharmaceuticals, medicines, or scientific particles: *Roferon A, Salbutanol, Fenozolozol*. Is this an area of interest to you, either linguistically or scientifically?**

ZN: **The titles are due to my interest in drugs, and due to my job in the medical sector, it was a provocation.**

Douris seems to be helming the mixing booth, as the sounds move in a faster, more concrete direction than is Angles' wont. As such, it's as hard to think of this as a Zone Nord track as it is to think of *Big Trouble* as a Cassavetes film. There's a heavy dose of Das Synthetische Mischgewebe-style tape-gargling here, and Douris really throws the kitchen sink at this track, with celestial arcs drifting amidst an oscillator-heavy low end that refers back to Angles' field of expertise. It sounds like Zone Nord's contributions were curated and folded into the mixture along with many other sound sources, and that Angles didn't have much of a hand in the final mixing, in the way that Löwenbrück's source sounds were so clearly broken apart into component pigments for the canvas that was *Salbutanol*. Not so much a finale as a footnote.

CONCLUSION:

ALAP: **What caused you to drop out of sound exploration and noise music? Will there ever be another Zone Nord release? Do you have any words for your fans?**

ZN: **After all those releases, I tried to develop a techno style with no interesting results and also lost my motivation. Courage, the worst is to come.**

Based on his comments here, it's hard to imagine that Jean-Luc Angles is ever coming back. And why should he? Who in their right mind would, after ticking off a near-perfect record of releases with no serious clunkers, return to the fray and risk an almost-certain decline in brilliance? It's a no-brainer. But it still doesn't stop many of us from secretly wishing for a comeback. Why is that? Must noise be a fact of life for everyone who has ever taken part in it? There seems to be this fear that if someone can do noise really well and then decides NOT to dedicate their life to it, that it implicates the rest of us. Why do we feel like we NEED to have everyone here with us at all times? Will it make us look like gibbering stooges, or addicts, if we're unable to similarly pack up and leave it all behind at a moment's notice? Not every noise creator needs to be Noise For Life: maybe for some, it's a summer romance, or a brief diversion before finding another path.

Zone Nord's albums grow in power and mystery with age — there's no "unfortunate comeback album" to be found in his discography, and if the technology seems dated now, the ideas seem as new and relevant now as ever, the truest test of a classic.

100 artists can't be wrong

Die Tödliche Doris
New Blockaders
Frieder Butzmann
Das Synthetische Mischgewebe
Non Toxique Lost
Maurizio Bianchi
Hijokaidan
EG Oblique Graph / Muslimgauze
John Duncan
Colin Potter
Sprung Aus Den Wolken
Absolute Body Control
Le Syndicat
Ramleh
Sutcliffe Jugend
Consumer Electronics
Asmus Tietchens
Storm Bugs
Cultural Amnesia
Esplendor Geometrico
Controlled Bleeding
Legendary Pink Dots

Severed Heads
S.P.K
Gerechtigkeits Liga
Etant Donnes
Nocturnal Emissions
We Be Echo
Third Door From The Left
Hermann Nitsch
Andrew Liles
Scattered Order
Makers Of Dead Travel Fast
Polyphonic Size
Norma Loy
Vidna Obmana
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SEWER ELECTION

DAN JOHANSSON INTERVIEWED
BY MIKKO ASPA
INTRODUCTION BY SAM MCKINLAY

Darkness in Harsh Noise; a legacy that is carried on by few contemporary artists who are able to naturally grasp the concepts and the feel for the driven, underlying danger that Harsh Noise can generate. Some highly committed artists have the mental diligence and artistic merits to drive their projects further into the grimy depths via different generative techniques and highly personal development. One project that I have seen do this successfully, time and time again, is Sewer Election.

My earliest recollection of hearing Sewer Election was when I was in the midst of catching up with more contemporary artists after my degree was completed, and acquiring his 2004 work, *Torpa Freak-In*. During the listening experience, it didn't take long to establish that this was the material of post-2000 to watch for; works that carry the dangerous and obsessed possibilities of Harsh Noise concentration. After direct contact with Dan and my acquisition of further works, it became another project that was a 'go-to' for contemporary Harsh Noise that always toted a very dirty underbelly from the powerful lines created to destroy and fester above. The rocks of sexual interest and raw filth, always invariably carried with a Northern feel, were being carved deeper still when Dan teamed up with the fellow Swede project TRERIKSRÖSET to generate one of the most powerful harsh noise projects of all time — the KILLING FOR... cassette series. The KILLING FOR... series seemed to generate something even more ominous for Dan, as his projects and obsession during and afterwards reached new pinnacles with magnified soil studies from SEWER ELECTION and further examinations into very real depravity with the collaborative work of DOG HOLOCAUST, which includes the US project KAKERLAK. The above works and projects are proof-positive that Dan is in it for the long haul, and will always let his seamy interests and bleak Northern feel for his works permeate the crumbling and deteriorating lines of noise he generates.

It was a privilege and a rare opportunity to tour with Dan along the US East Coast in the weeks prior to No Fun Fest 2008, and not only was the 'Scandinavian' member of the tour helpful with 'press' and the sets always amazing (SE and DOG HOLOCAUST alike), but it was also great to see Dan's eyes light up at the proper moments of the usual HN depravity lurking behind the scenes. For me, this was simply more proof of his dedication to both the sound and the darker interests that seem to drive the most critical of harsh noise artists.

AS LOUD AS POSSIBLE: **You have been doing noise for some years now, but I think your approach and ideas have been changing somewhat during this time. What you would think are the main 'milestones' or important things in the history of Sewer Election (SE) when it comes to forming the project or defining its style?**

DAN JOHANSSON, SEWER ELECTION: **During the years, I have refined my approach, both sound- and art-wise, drastically. In the earlier stages I was all over the place with very little focus on anything. I still managed get some decent recordings out heavily influenced by Pain Jerk and mid-'90s Merzbow. By the time I started Harsh Head Rituals in 2005, I got more focused and clear about what i wanted to do. Everything is now very stripped down and basic. Crude and raw. Less effect pedals and more live acoustics and body sounds.**

ALAP: **Before the 3-inch on Freak Animal, you had already started to distance yourself from the high speed cut-up style that was the trademark of early Sewer Election, and at the same time, distancing yourself from the hi-fi type of sound. You seemed to not only embrace the sound of cruder wall of noise, but also the cassette format. How did this kind of development happened?**

SE: **After I learned the ropes on how to create decent noise, I just grew bored with doing the high speed cut-ups. It felt empty. I wanted to go back to what turned me on to Harsh Noise in the first place. Harsh dense noise from labels like MSNP, Uncut, Spite, Deadline, Labyrinth, etc. Just raw, uncompromising material. And from there I went to now being more into working with acoustic and body sounds. Still with a nasty vibe to it. Tapes are perfect. Great fidelity for noise, can take a good beating, they're easy to erase and re-use, they're analogue, they look good, and they are cheap.**

ALAP: **Some of the tapes were, however, re-released on CD later on. Do you find it necessary to put out the CD to satisfy 'listeners' who often (even nowadays when we're in kind of a resurrection of tape-culture) wouldn't bother to buy the tape? Wouldn't it be ideal to just make a big edition of the tape alone?**

SE: **When I release tapes, I usually prefer to do them in smaller editions, mainly because I dub most of them at home and it takes a lot of time. If someone later on wants to re-release them as CDs, that's usually fine by me if the label is worthy. When I did The Rita — *Retrospective* 8 x cassette box in an edition of 50, it was a pure labour of love on my part and consumed much time and energy from me. Still, loads of people complained and whatnot about a too-small edition, etc. When I do tapes, I do them for selfish reasons. Harsh Head Rituals is not aiming for mass production. You snooze, you lose. The scene is flooded with releases anyway, so I don't really see a big need in doing larger editions than, say, 100-150 of cassettes.**

ALAP: **Do you think the idea of the tape format is directly influenced to the sound? Would you want to re-release some of the old SE stuff (like, for example, the CDr on Harshnoise.com) on tape now?**

SE: **Yes, it's bound to be since I use the format heavily while recording in different ways, plus my cassette amplifier is one of the core items of my equipment nowadays. *Torpa Freak-In*...I actually considered re-releasing that CDr on cassette sometime in 2008 but it just didn't happen.**

ALAP: **In your process of sound, I have also noticed that you used tape manipulation also in live situations. Is this also part of the process when you work with your studio material?**

SE: **Yes. I often use a minimal setup of three pedals or less and a cassette amplifier that I run the sounds through a few times, so tapes are essential for studio sessions. I also ventured into reel-to-reel loops lately. Gives more opportunities for manipulation than regular cassette loops.**

ALAP: **Are you 'conscious' about this method? Meaning did it just happen, and are you moving on to new things all the time, or do you think limiting your gear and idea of sound creation to a specific setting will give you a bigger potential to reach something?**

SE: **I think limiting your gear opens more doors when it comes to carving out good sounds than having a massive table of pedals. The work tends to get more focused and refined. It pushes creativity to explore sounds inside and out. It's almost fundamental when it comes to Sewer Election that the less equipment I use, the more useful material is recorded.**

ALAP: **Do you consider the gear itself important, specific pedal or specific brand of tape deck or such?**

SE: **Gear is not of importance for making good noise. You don't need 20 expensive custom-built pedals to record really good noise. Blod is a good example of this. What you need is a sense for details, textures and love for sounds. For recording I mostly use my cassette amplifier and shitty Walkmans, but for listening to Noise cassettes, I use my Nakamichi decks. Sewer Election has become more and more stripped down gear-wise during the years. For the vinyl LP on PAN, no effect pedals were used, only metal junk, field recordings, reel-to-reel loops, body sounds, and some additional analogue synth works. Same with *Bristning* cassette/LP. Less effects, more raw stuff.**

ALAP: **In recordings, do you consider volume essential in noise? Tape manipulation also allows you to work in silence but high volume recordings often bring different results. Do you value real 'amplification' in the work of SE?**

SE: **Sure, recording loud sounds has its points, but I still think you can crank out the goods bedroom style. Take *Sex/Death*, for example; all recorded in my apartment. But since we started Utmarken (small record store run by Release the Bats, as well as a venue, label and rehearsal/hangout space for Sewer Election, Ättestupa, Viking Jews, Street Drinkers, Källarbarnen, etc.), things have been great. Amps and PA ready to be used at any time. Just perfect. I still mostly use the space for making metal junk recordings and other live acoustic stuff.**

ALAP: **I think your studio output takes precedence over the live activity, but I do see an increasing amount of live shows lately, including a tour around the USA. In live shows, besides the tape manipulation, you often use scrap metal, or more precisely, drum cymbals. They often end up being trashed acoustically, so that when things (contact mics) break down, it doesn't stop the frenzy. Does your approach differ much depending on whether the situation is studio or live?**

SE: **Recent live performances have been non-active ones, doing harsh drone similar to the material on the *Last Breath* CDr, which Gameboy released. I always use backing sources being fed into pedals when doing the all-out harsh sets due to the nature of them. It's good to have some sort of 'control' amidst the chaos. There's a big difference in live situations and studio. In the studio, things are more planned and worked out in more detail sound-wise.**

The US tour was really good. To see The Rita, Kakerlak, Oscillating Innards, and Work/Death night after night was sick. Even better was that it gave me an opportunity to perform and record as Dog Holocaust together with Nolan of Kakerlak. The radio set we recorded for Ning Nong went above expectations and turned out really good.

ALAP: **You have also done collaboration tapes (which were later re-released on CD) with Treriksröset. How did these start to happen? Have all recordings been mail collaborations?**

SE: **When Kristian Olsson of Alfarmania organized the BrytBröt-Fest in Sundsvall back in 2005, me and Tommy talked about the possibility of doing a collaboration live set plus record a cassette especially for that night. Since both me and Tommy have a quite similar vision of how pure raw HN live assaults should be done, we instantly clicked as collab partners. The Sundsvall show worked out great, and after that night we just continued to play together when opportunity was given. All our collaborations have been thru mail so far except for the latest session which we recorded live in Köket, Rågsved, Stockholm earlier this year. That recording will probably be out sooner or later somewhere.**

ALAP: **Have you had any plans for further collaborations (not counting Edwige) with someone else or continue 'exclusively' your partnership with Treriksröset?**

SE: **There's been talks about doing one with local Wall Noise artist Skönhet. Also plans have been made to record more with Joachim Nordwall as Reptile Piss. We've got one session completed, but it's unreleased so far. There's been talk of doing a mail collaboration with Rodger Stella as well.**

ALAP: **Have you been satisfied with the mail collaboration system? Have you had any intentions for physically recording in the same studio? Do you think it would give some new options or be harmful with restrictions?**

SE: **As mentioned earlier, I have recorded together with Treriksröset in Köket, Rågsved. Even though that turned out really good, I still feel more comfortable with mail collaborations since there's more time to get into details and let the sounds sink in before you start working with the material.**

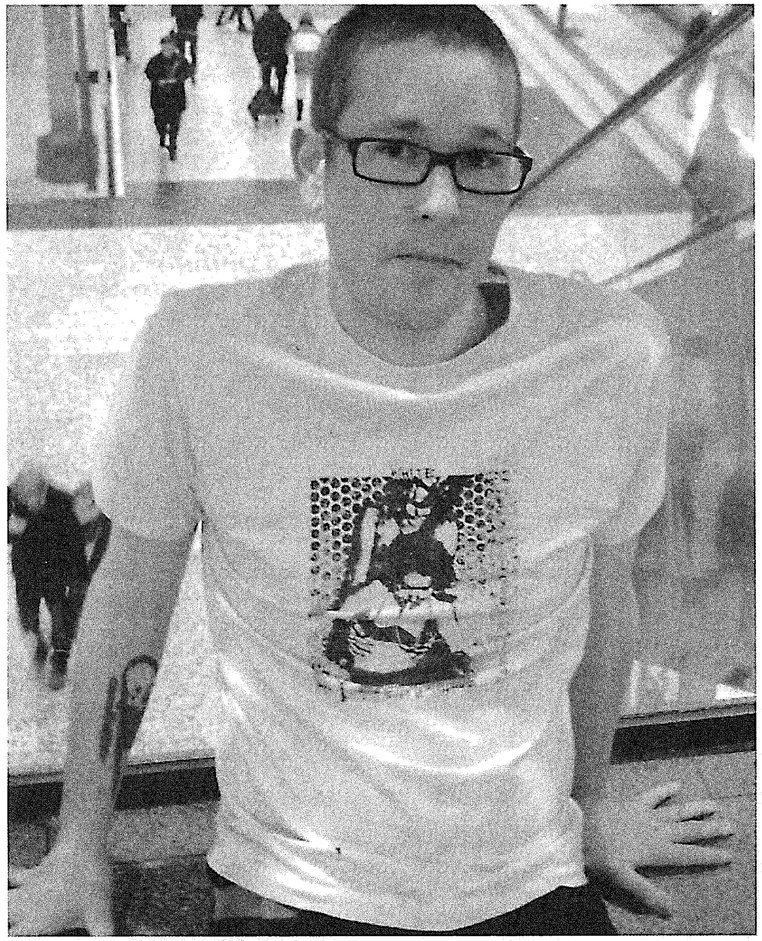
ALAP: **When you create music, how separate is it from the visual or other ideas used? I see that this area of your project has changed during the years. Maybe along with the tape format and xerox artworks came harsher visuals, too?**

SE: **For me, the visual aspect in Harsh Noise sculpturing is essential for delivering atmosphere. The longer I have been involved, the more back-to-the-roots my visuals have become. I grew up in the Punk scene, where badly xeroxed art and music zines were very common and it has of course influenced my work to a certain degree.**

The recent harsher and cruder art draws inspiration from the mid-'90s harsh cassette culture, which made a huge impact on me and everything noise-related I lay my hands on. I remember how blown away I was with the MSNP tapes. Sheer brutality.

ALAP: **I don't think I have seen much 'original art' in SE covers, more often recycled & destroyed photos, etc. Is this method intentional? Do you have interest in other means of creating artwork than 'collage' or destroying/manipulating found images with a xerox machine?**

SE: **The method is intentional, and no, though some photos I used for artwork are private ones I shot. I have considered doing a small book on HHR with xerox art, but don't know if it will happen or not.**



Gothenburg. 2009

ALAP: **Does the artwork tell much about the person behind the project? Is it supposed to, or is it irrelevant to the listener what you would be saying — if anything?**

SE: **It says nothing about me as a private person. The releases are what they are.**

ALAP: **Do you consider Harsh Head Rituals as a directly connected idea with SE, even if you also put out other bands? The aesthetics seem to walk hand-in-hand. What are your aims with the label?**

SE: **Harsh Head Rituals is a extension of Sewer Election and vice-versa. The goal of the label is to continue to release the cream of the crop of harsh electronics on cassette or vinyl format, while presenting some new blood as well. I must confess though that HHR is on a hiatus at the moment, since Utmarken steals a lot of time and attention from me. Also a new label, NATTMARAN will soon be launched soon. First out will be a Källarbarnen 12-inch. The future holds releases with Smutsiga Fingrar, Ättestupa, and more.**

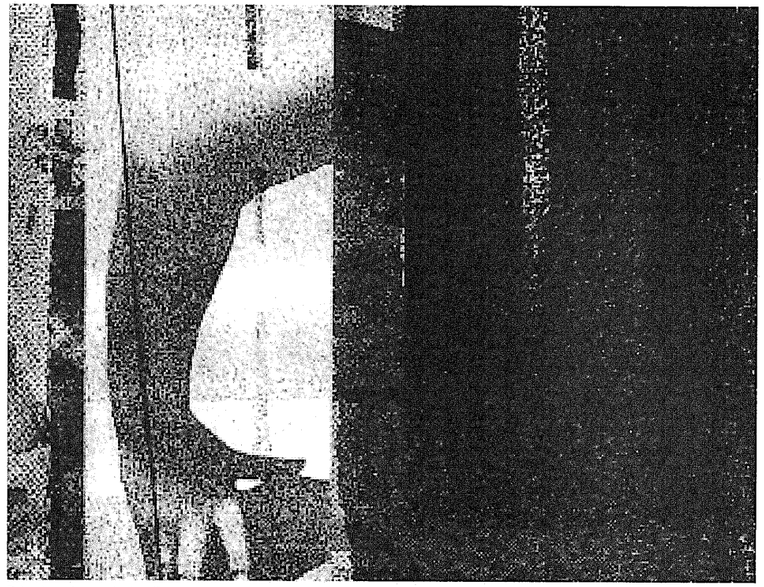
ALAP: **You do not consider CD an option for HHR?**

SE: **I won't rule it out for the future, but for now, I'm quite pleased to work with vinyl and tapes.**

ALAP: **There has sometimes been a polemic within the scene about the new formats and new approaches, as opposed to a retro/old-school attitude. In a way it is justified, when Noise often was the experimental and adventurous genre, basically on edge of new things. Is there more in the choice to stick to 'traditional methods' (analogue format, homemade covers & xeroxes, etc.) beyond a mere aesthetic choice? Do you think SE and HHR make some kind of stand against where the current new school of Noise is heading?**

SE: **Not at all. My activities within Noise are done purely on my own personal tastes and interests. Nothing else.**

ALAP: **It is clear that SE is not totally independent 'artist,' but belongs to a specific side of the scene/genre, namely Harsh Noise. Do you think the idea of belonging to some bigger 'movement' would have advantages as opposed to being kind of an egoistic, separatist 'noise artist' who wishes to be set apart from everybody else?**



Bristning. (artwork detail)

SE: **The advantage of being involved in a specific scene is obvious. It's easier to get shit rolling and easier to get shit done, but I don't really network much nowadays and I'm pretty much out of it. Life.**

ALAP: **Often, HHR seems to have quite a 'strict' circle of collaborators in terms of who is distributing items. Do you have an interest in expanding or reaching people outside the already established circle of supporters?**

SE: **I have a good relationship with the few distributors I work with and am quite pleased with that. I see no reason to expand my activities to reach new people. Segerhuva, Molehill, Freak Animal, Release the Bats and a few more selected distributors are more than enough; they do a good job distributing my titles.**

ALAP: **Besides the kind of 'established' names, you have already released work by some much less well-known ones. Do you actively look for new artists to put out?**

SE: **It goes in waves when I search for newer acts to release. I was more active with it before. Most of my focus has been outside of the Harsh Noise scene lately, running Utmarken and focusing on different projects not associated with Harsh Head Rituals.**

ALAP: **Is there any particular release you feel the most proud of in the history of the label, or of SE?**

SE: **The Edwige LP that Segerhuva released. One of my favourite Harsh Noise recordings. A perfect blend of what I truly love about the Harsh Noise genre. The sources Keith/Mania and Sam/The Rita sent me were perfect and very easy to work with. With HHR, I'm especially pleased and proud with all three vinyl releases, Alfarmania/Proiekt Hat, Grunt, and Jason Crumer. All three present the artists in their prime. Essential stuff.**

ALAP: **Do you associate yourself with the new rising 'wall of noise' subgenre?**

SE: **No, as a project Sewer Election is much more diverse and it would be ridiculous to categorise it as that. Some recordings I've done can be categorised as Wall Noise, though. I guess it is because my participation on the TOTAL SLITTING OF THROATS CD and THE KILLING SESSIONS that some people lump me into that subgenre.**

ALAP: **How do you personally feel about Noise that is limited to such a narrow formula?**

SE: **Only a few can pull it off with dignity and respect, like The Rita, Richard Ramirez, and a few others. I find the Magazine 2 x cs on Abisko to be the highpoint for that subgenre. It's a defining release to say the least. Flawless, both in sound and presentation. I really like the minimalism and cracks, but my main concern with the new breed of 'Wall Noise' is that it doesn't always come off as genuine and, in some ways, seems like an easy way out, you know. No balls.**

ALAP: **When looking from the perspective of SE as a project, what would be the 'defining releases' of other projects that have in some way influenced or inspired you to do your own work?**

SE: **When I first got into Noise, the first two tapes that changed everything was Black Leather Jesus — *Torturous Chapter and Macronympha — Grind*. As soon as I heard those two, everything became much clearer. The power and grit of those recordings was overwhelming for me. They may not be Noise classics in the true sense, but these two tapes started it all for me. Also, the Swedish cassette-scene in last years has been truly inspiring, both label and noise-wise. Labels like Vigilante Tapes, Abisko, Kickacid, Styggelse, Hatband, and others are of great importance. Some other recordings that made a great impact on me and changed how I percieve music are Macronympha — *Pittsburgh, PA* LP and various tapes; early The New Blockaders; C.C.C.C. — *Loud Sounds Dopa* CD; *Noise War* 2 x cs; *Slave Labour* — Vol.I & II 2 x cs; Pain Jerk — *Aktion Bruit* cs; and loads of other mid-'90s noise tapes.**

ALAP: **Do you find inspiration outside the Harsh Noise realm and have you ever thought of expanding the SE sound further? Say, incorporating old-school Industrial, Power Electronics, Electro-Acoustic, etc.?**

SE: **Of course I do. Inspiration comes from lots of things...minimalist BM like Ildjarn, Von and Bone Awl, which shines through on the split with Impregnable. I listen to tons of stuff and Harsh Noise is just one of the genres. Lately, I have been listening to Fylkingen stuff, Yoshi Wada, Black Sabbath, Albert Ayler, Hanna Hirsh, La Monte Young, Russell Haswell and more...as for old-school Industrial and Power Electronics, I like the usual suspects... Mauthausen Orchestra, Korpses Katatonik, Final Solution, Sutcliffe Jugend, etc. Also, life in general is a big influence. The SE sound is always undergoing changes and making new explorations. The *Kassettmusik* CD on Ideal, for example, is one step removed from the Harsh Noise realm. Just simple crude tape sounds, not HN at all, but still very much in line with what I strive to achieve with the project.**

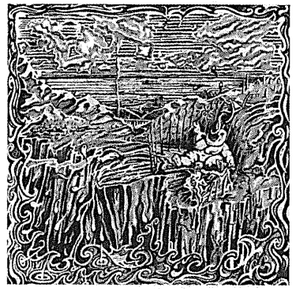
ALAP: **Talking about the Swedish scene being big influence, I think it could be easy to say that, noise-wise, Sweden is living now in its golden years, while the country's quite glorious & famous history of Death Industrial seems to be less hyped these days. How do you see the scene developing and what kind of future you see for Swedish Noise?**

SE: **The Industrial/Noise scene is pretty solid here in Sweden. We have acts like Alfarmania, Ochu, Jarl, Vårtgård, Blood Ov Thee Christ, Cock Tribe, Källarbarnen, Treriksröset, IRM, Regim, Proiekt Hat, and Altar of Flies, among others. Label-wise, we have Styggelse, Abisko, Gothenburg Blood Cult, Inkasso, Nattens Bödlar, Vigilante Tapes, Segerhuva, Ideal Recordings, and Hästen och Korset making shit happening and worthwhile in the cold north. I think the last five years have been truly over the top, with loads of great releases and some few heavy live shows.**

The scene in Gothenburg has really exploded since we got Utmarken. It started when me and Matthias/RTB started looking for a empty space here in the city and found this old auto mechanic shop. From there it just grew. As a label, we've done tapes with Dog Holocaust, The Rita, Aaron Dilloway, Street Drinkers, Heavy Winged, Alfarmania, Golden Jooklo Age, Ättestupa, and more. We've put up shows with everything from Deathroes to Uton to Frozen Faces. We also had a few art exhibitions, including a really good one featuring Kristian Olsson of Alfarmania. If anyone has the slightest interest in what's brewing in the underground of Gothenburg, I highly recommed picking up the *Utmarken* 10-inch that RTB just released.

ALAP: **Do you have any specific projects upcoming?**

SE: **Well, with Sewer Election I finished a new record which is out on PAN, as well as the vinyl reissue of Bristning on Release The Bats. As for other stuff I'm involved with: Smutsiga Fingrar just managed to pile together enough material to record our first tape soon. It's like a mix between The Velvet Underground, Joy Division and Spacemen 3 filtered through a bag of shit, just good sleazed-out no-fi rock. Ättestupa released a cassette on Abisko, a 12-inch on DNT will be out any day, and we will start recording our new full length album later this autumn/winter. Also, I mentioned it before, but I'm really pleased about starting up the label NATTMARAN with Viktor Ottosson, known from Leafes and Ättestupa.**



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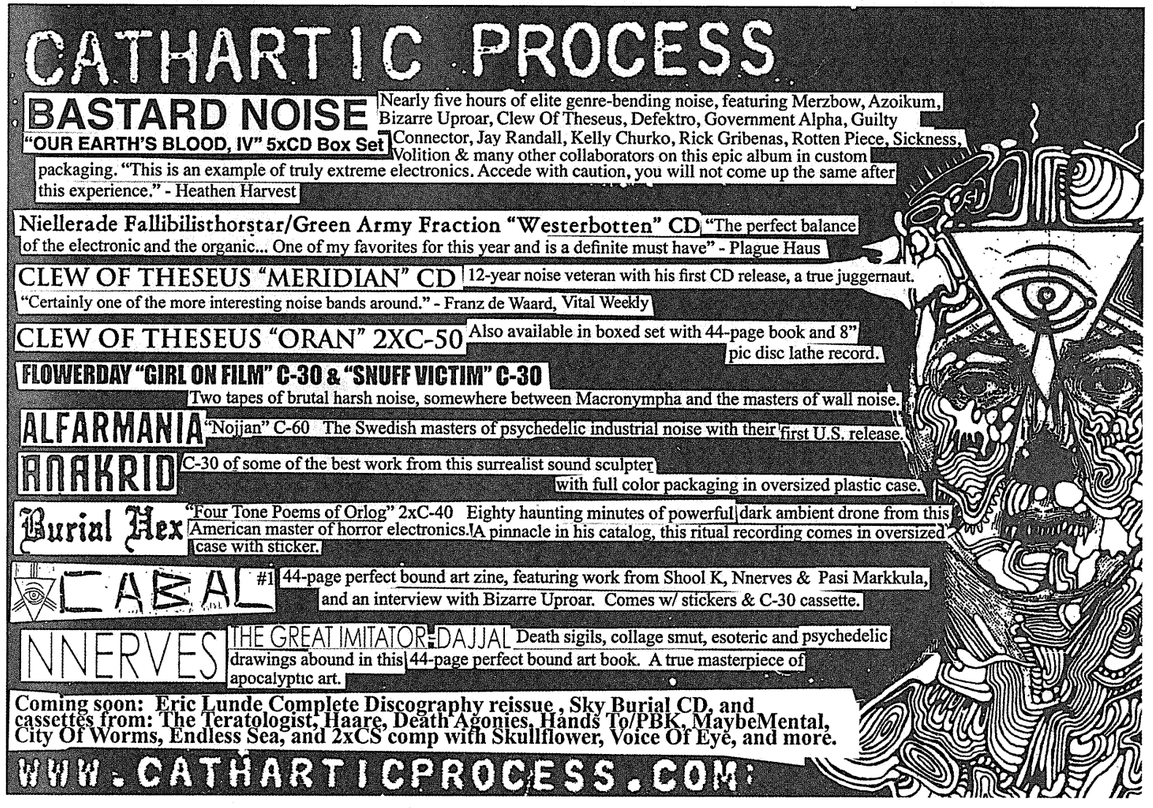
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30 YEARS OF

THE HATERS

BY GX JUPITTER-LARSEN

In my late adolescence I was essentially homeless. I decided I hadn't made a big enough mess of my life. Constantly floating from town to town was a good start, but the mess needed to be grander. So over time I orchestrated an international support network that would allow me to travel freely, celebrating entropy. The Haters became part noise crew, conceptual performance troupe, and fraternity of the absurd.

For twenty-plus years I travelled the world several times over, living as a nomad, doing my art. Till I started doing more solo-based performances, The Haters would always be touring. Whenever this vandalizing vagabond arrived somewhere, a performance would get organized, and some local performers would join me in donning hoods and making noise. Among this volume of noisicians were the likes of Colin Upton, Ken Gerberick, Fraser Hall, AMK, Paul Dickerson, Bob Ferbrache, Mike Dando, John Sharp, Crank Sturgeon, Damion Romero, Elden M., Kimihide Kusafuka, Koji Tano, and Paul Stoll, as well as various members of Survival Research Laboratories.

In many early shows inside agitators would lead the audience to riot. Trashing venues was the order of the day. Even the releases would be a kind of debris. A silent record completed by the listener scratching it. A CD played by rubbing dirt on it. And a record pressed with random grooves so it always sounded different.

Free thought fused with non-confrontational violence became the untitled ideology of The Haters. For a mess to be a truly BIG mess, you have to destroy only discarded rubbish and let the mess mean something clutter has never meant before. This thing has continued to decay. The performances have gone from tearing paper in 1979, to blowing up hillsides in 1986, to amplifying architecture by building empty holes during the 1990s, and engineering fields of noise grown from the amplification of erosion in 2010. Amplified funnels dragging on rotating sandpaper stood as a mantra of erosion.

In the late 1970s I was done with the Punk scene. It was fun, even meaningful, but it just wasn't noisy enough for me. Sure, I wanted a 'White Riot' of my own, but why yodel about it when you could actually go out and live it? I needed to make a clean break from Punk, and start with a blank slate.

I started a project called **THE HATERS.** People always ask: "Why The Haters?" I tell them once the name came to me I was too lazy to ever change it. Actually, when it came time to pick a name for my project I wanted something both brutal yet potentially open to interpretation. In the late 70s when I came up with the term 'Haters' it was such an infrequently used word that most people thought it was a misspelling of 'hatters'. People just couldn't even bring themselves to say the word half the time. It was perfect. The word sounded harsh, and harsh equaled noise. It had impact, and that meant noise. And it could mean pretty much whatever one wanted, which also seemed pretty noisy to me at the time. Because it was largely meaningless, the word 'Haters' was a completely inappropriate yet highly efficient standard under which notions of free thought, entropy, and the polywave could be copiously debated and dispensed. Thirty years later, the word 'hater' has become so excessively overused in popular culture that it once again has lost all significant meaning. It still sounds like a word, but that's about it. What it actually refers to has long been lost in the hiss of that overstimulating massmedia backdrop. Meaningless due to over-usage instead of under-usage, for completely opposite reasons then, the term 'Haters' remain my placard of preference! Well, more often than not anyway. As long as it keeps them guessing.

Socially, what could be noisier than plain confusion? Information is what things do, not what things are. With juxtaposition of context and content in place, most people have found The Haters a deeply puzzling delivery system for ideas. What these people don't understand is that the purest form of social noise is doubt. Fans of The Haters seem to instinctively understand this about the project. For me The Haters have been successful because after thirty years of constant worldwide activity, people either get it or they don't. No explanation is needed for those who do. No explanation will do for those who don't. That's confusion for you; and I like it. I like it a lot.

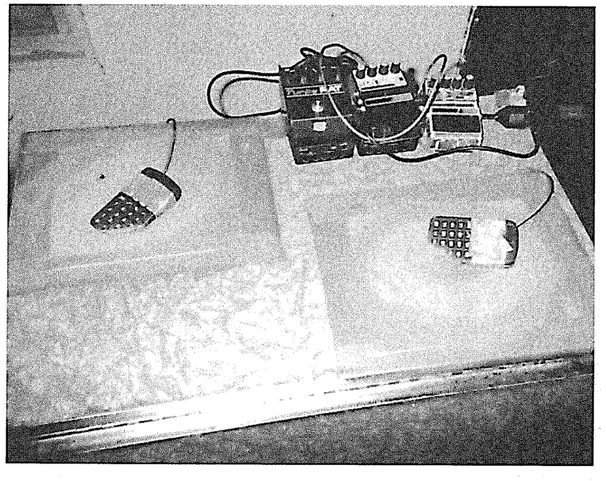
Back in New York in 1979, confusion for me meant the kind of noise I was looking for wouldn't be the audible kind. What I was looking for was a sociological transmission. A social distortion instead of sonic feedback would be my personal post-punk mandate.

I returned to the Pacific Northwest to start working out some different potential methodologies, but most of my first performances didn't involve any deliberate use of sound. Even if there were any, the audio was secondary to the theatrical concepts I wanted to deal with; concepts of cultural - asymmetry, aesthetic-fanaticism, and other such transexpansion numerals. My offerings were mostly simple ceaseless actions. Events such as hitting videocassettes with a video camera, watching dust form on a floor, or counting garbage cans along a street.

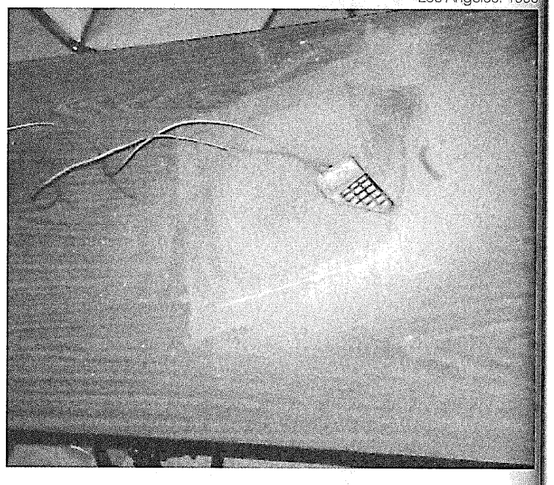
I only started using sound in my performances because of two necessities: the need of a stage curtain, and the need to keep track of time. Traditionally, the opening of the stage curtain signals the beginning of a performance, while the closing signals the conclusion. As nearly no place I performed had such drapery, I needed to come up with something else that would duplicate this function. So, I started using prerecorded sounds on tape. The sudden start of the noise would let everyone in the audience know that the performance had just begun. Likewise, the abrupt end of the soundtrack unmistakably marked the finale. Everyone understood this application, regardless if they had been told the meaning or not.

Many of my performances during the 1980s and into the early 90s involved whole audiences being led by inside agitators to actually ruin or destroy entire venues. The most outrageous of these types of performances took place during the years I lived in Denver. Typically the stage would be dressed with piles of garbage. The performers came out at the start of the soundtrack. We would first tear paper, and then cut cardboard, then break wooden stuff, smash glass, and finally we would wreak big metal things. At some point the agitators would be given a cue to start their agitating to get people to join in. These performances were very violent, but never confrontational. After a hundred such performances, only once did an audience member have to be sent to emergency for stitches. The only time a fellow performer ever got seriously injured was in Berkeley in 1987. An overly excited person in the audience accidentally smacked a piece of lumber into AMK's forehead. As I said, it was an accident.

San Francisco. 1999



Los Angeles. 1998

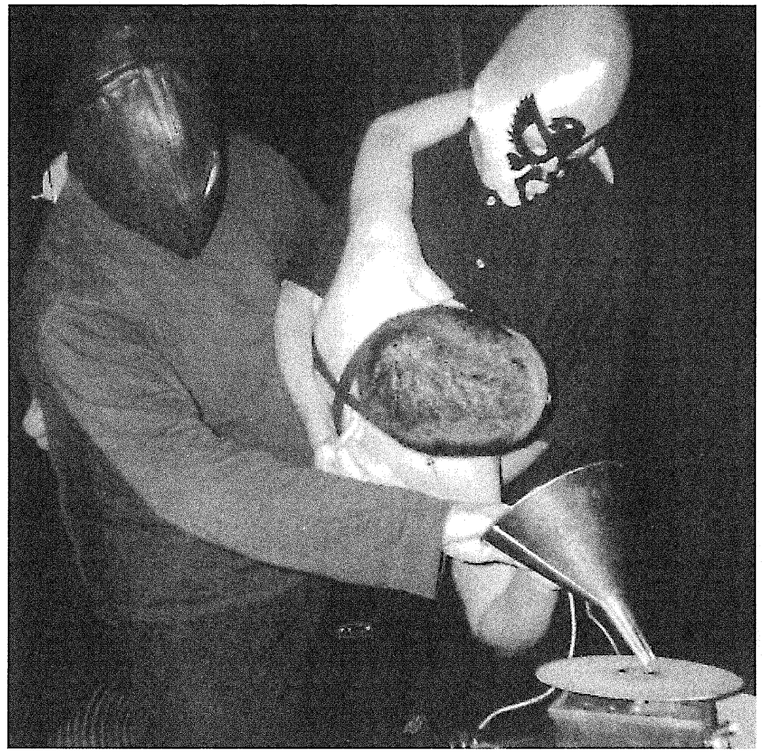


The violence of these shows was never directed at any single person or persons. The collective release of energy was always pointed towards the props. And sometimes, even the venue itself would be left in ruin. Proprietors weren't always informed of the choreography in advice. Occasionally we would have to set off large smoke bombs in order to make our get-away. It sounds cartoonish now, but back then it wasn't all that uncommon to have a getaway car waiting for us in the back with the motor running.

A quick escape became critical on more than one occasion. These were my celebrations of entropy: a permawave of debris by an audience that was as much a part of the actual performance as the performers were. You wouldn't think the prerecorded soundtracks would even be noticed by any one with all the pandemonium transpiring; but what made the fuzzy lo-fi soundtracks in these celebrations truly amazing, was how every time, without any conditioning beforehand, entire audiences would halt their mayhem the very instant the soundtrack stopped. It made no difference if the attendance was 20 or 200. When the pre-recorded sound stopped, so did the live action.

People take leadership from electricity; even more so than from the person behind the on-off switch. I usually do many variations of any single performance piece. At a number of instances during the 1990's, The Haters & I performed while simultaneously showing video of a previous version of the very same performance piece. All the while I couldn't help but notice how people would wind up watching the video more so than the actual live action that was taking place in front of them. People take their cue from the electron. That's why it was obvious to have the extremities of the soundtrack utilized as the movement of a stage curtain. One could predetermine the length of a performance by choosing the length of the recording.At first I didn't care what the sound on the tape was as long as it was constant. Otherwise I had no other interest in sound on my stage for years. This didn't mean I wasn't interested in sound at all. Far from it! I have always been obsessed with the sounds of destruction. I fall to pieces every time I hear glass breaking. I get excited whenever I hear the crackle of fire. The blast of something blowing up detonates my desires. If I were to construct such entropic noise collages, however, I would leave such activity for the recording studio. In fact, whenever I'm in the studio, I've always given great detail to every aspect of my lustrous lo-fi mighty mono sound. A release and a live performance are two different things. I've absolutely never seen any reason whatsoever why one had to sound anything like the other.

There are a few exceptions. Namely, some conceptual records I released in the late 1980s and early 90s. One was entitled *Oxygen Is Flammable*. It was a broken piece of plastic packaged in a small box. Enclosed were instructions that stated that the broken plastic is a record. And that one played it by pouring water over it. The instructions also called attention to possible similarities between the sounds of water falling and fire rising. Another was called Shear. It was a ball of cotton batting packaged in a small box. Wrapped around the contents are instructions on three thin strips of paper. Instructions, which informs the holder that the cotton ball was a recording. And that this record was played by being squeezed. The sound this record gave being a "sharp fluffy slightness" and a "thin fluffy pressed." These two releases were in and of themselves, a kind of performance piece. I would experiment with incorporating live sounds with the prerecorded, but this was never a high priority for me until my 101st performance. There, live sound



New York. 1997

became a central component for my theatre. Celebrating entropy by breaking everything in sight again, over the next ten years. It was such a oddly happy noise.

With my 174th performance, Paris on October 30th 1992, I would slowly push a live microphone into a power grinder to gently wear it down to a stub. Erosion as penetration of the void. For erosion is the only way a solid object can truly penetrate the void. The audience cheered on. This action would become another recurring motif for me for years.

During the 1990s I developed many different recurring techniques using amplified gear. The only reason I started incorporating live sound in my performances was to re-emphasize the action taking place. Not for the sake of the sound itself. There's no linear progression here. Themes and techniques would overlap back and forth, but overall, my performances were getting louder. By 1995 I had ceased using pre-recorded soundtracks altogether. I would now use any one of several theatrical devices to function as stage curtains. As I moved away from destroying debris en masse to specifically eroding one particular object over a span of time, I experimented with my own type of narrative arc. Something like the continuing storyline in episodic storytelling you see on television. In a performance piece entitled "Mind The Gap" I would use an amplified staple-gun to shatter a stack of LPs. A taller stack was used every time I did the piece.

Then there was "Drunk On Decay," in which a suspended amplified funnel was allowed to drag and erode on a spinning sandpaper turntable. The narrative arc of this series was that every time the piece was performed, the funnel was hanging from something larger or heavier than the time before. Over time the dangling went from a shovel to people to motorcycles. The last time my funnel collided with sandpaper, it was from under an elevated truck on top a repair-shop hoist. I still plan to hang my funnel from under a raised house at some future point.

So, sound became a means of illustrating a narrative. For example, from 2000 to 2002, I would balance an amplified calculator on top of the open grill of a small desk fan. This was my way to bring to stage an image. That of mathematician Ross Rhesymolwaith sitting by an open window so he could feel the wind against his face while he did his calculations. The piece was entitled "Dirwyn." The sound and action were one in the same. One of the final enactments of "Dirwyn" was actually my 300th performance. It was staged in East Berlin in April 2002. The walls of the gallery quivered from the resulting reverberations.

San Francisco on June 10th 1990 saw performers each rubbing a calculator against very abrasive sandpaper. Another simple action, but this time a contact-mic had been mounted on the props. The sound of the rubbing was being amplified. It was loud. It was really loud! Sound finally became critical for me on stage because I wanted to tell a tale, and sound was needed for the narrative. This narrative was about one Ross Rhesymolwaith. Rhesymolwaith was a mathematician whose peace of mind was once said to sound much like calculators being rubbed against sandpaper. Calculation by

disintegration as a reference to "a beauty resorting from the wearing down of numbers." Such strongly audible ideals required an equally audible medium. Over the years I would perform this piece, which I called "The Thinking Ross Does," several more times in different cities all over the world.

As my 144th performance, in Zurich I used amplified electric drills to turn large wooden objects into sawdust. The piece was called "Building Empty Holes," but the action itself was still more important than the sounds involved.

It wasn't till my 155th performance, New York on December 28th 1991 when I found my next major audio fetish. I called it the clici-clic; a hand-held hole-punch mounted with a contact-mic for amplification. I would perform this action again and the most eventful phase in my use of sound in performance came when, instead of amplifying common tools, I started having my own costume devices built that were made solely for the purpose of making noise. By the late 1990s I became obsessed with the idea of a contrast between what the sound was and how the sound was made; juxtaposition as narrative.

Wrestling has always been a source of inspiration for me. Wrestling is the purest form of theatre of the absurd; one of non-confrontational violence where stereotypes are exaggerated beyond all recognition. Since its premiere in early 1999, my Untitled Title Belt has become my main sound source both on stage and in the studio. Just by looking at this belt, one wouldn't necessarily be able to tell that this implement is a combination microphone, distortion-pedal, and noise generator. It was fashioned after the traditional championship wrestling belt.

My 315th performance was at the first annual San Francisco Bay Area Harsh Noise Festival in 2004. I had taken an old record player and replaced the cartridge and arm with an amplified toy shovel. Instead of playing records, the shovel would drag against the bare turntable. That night Emil Beaulieau named it The Spinner Spade. Plumes of smoke expelled from the speakers as my Spinner Spade discharged a deafening full spectrum noise. I describe it as the happiness of digging holes in hum. Since then I've made a number of different Spinner Spades in all shapes and sizes. Each Spinner being just that much noisier than the one before. Perhaps the only project of mine that is really, entirely sound based is a piece I first performed in 2003. I had asked myself; if sound could have a psychical weight, what would it be? I did some research, but I decided the answer probably had little to do with measurement. In this piece, entitled "Audiothecary," amplified balance scales are used as a performance based utility for finding the weight of sound. The scales' beam with both of its two pans at either end are all wired to function as one large microphone. Any slight touch, even breathing on them, will produce a very substantial noise. Another thing I decided was that if a sound could have a psychical weight, it had to be measured in units of noise.

Entropy implies measuring! The future is just history after the loss of its temporal integrity! The present undoes everything! ...so the future implies much more noise to come...

Barcelona. 199

HECKER FRIEDER BUTZMANN KEITH FULLERTON WHITMAN
TREVOR WISHART BILLY BAO EVAN PARKER JOHN WIESE
JOSEPH HAMMER SEWER ELECTION RUDOLF EB.ER JOKE LANZ
DAS SYNTHETISCHE MISCHGEWEBE BLOOD STEREO ILIOS
MARK DURGAN ANDY ORTMANN FAMILY BATTLE SNAKE ASTRO

PAN
PAN-ACT.COM

ALIEN BRAINS, STORM BUGS, AND ANTI-MESSTHETICS

"ALIEN BRAINS WAS A SEMINAL INDEPENDENT ORGANIZATION FOUNDED IN 1979 AND RUN BY ME. A LIMITED NUMBER OF CASSETTE RECORDINGS AND OTHER MATERIALS WERE PRODUCED WITH NO TITLES, NO FIXED MEMBERS AND NO PRE-CONCEIVED TRACKS OR MUSICAL STRUCTURES. THE FIRST RELEASE WAS 'MENIAL DISORDERS' (DELETED RECORDS, 1980) AND THE LAST WAS VERDENSKANG'S 'AND IT'S THERE' (ADN, 1985)." - NIGEL JACKLIN, 2005

BY STEVE UNDERWOOD

Live Performances: 'We generally travelled to these on foot or by public transport. They were usually announced but often sparsely attended. Some 600 people may have attended the first performance, with a handful, if any, attending the latter. This was the secret to our success.' **NJ, 2005**

Personnel: Nigel Jacklin
Plus: Allen Adams, Bendle, Gogo Bonomo, Rod Gordon, Truus de Groot, David Jackman, Mark Lancaster, Chris Lines, Nag, Protag, Neal Purvis, Philip Rupenus, Richard Rupenus, Philip Sanderson, Harold Schellinx, various public schoolboys, etc.

A cursory glance at the list of names submitted as part-players in the various formations of Alien Brains puts to rest straightaway the most common misconception that the mysterious unit was nothing more than another side-project of the Rupenus brothers — Philip and Richard — taking time out from their work as The New Blockaders. Secondly, the cast list proves that Alien Brains acted as a nexus, albeit fleeting at times, where key players from some of the now most fawned over musical sub-currents such as 'Messthetics,' 'Drone,' 'Noise,' and 'Killed By Death' (KBD) — cottage-industry Punk for want of a better term — shared interests and ideas, converged under the direction of Nigel Jacklin, and worked out these ideas via a series of cassettes and live performances from the late '70s to mid-'80s.

You could be forgiven for thinking that the post-Punk world offered little more than Simon Reynolds' touchstones of yellowed copies of the NME, second-generation dubs of John Peel sessions, or the scratchy guitars of the first Scritti Politti record, but it's actually Reynolds who made the observation (and maybe in retrospect it's an obvious one) that "It sometimes seems that almost everybody who heard Throbbing Gristle started their own band," and Jacklin's story is a concrete representation of that truth. The story about TG playing an all-boys school, for example, has already been written into legend. Oundle was a private school somewhere on the outskirts of Peterborough, and whilst a pupil there, Jacklin convinced his music teacher to book a performance for TG. But it's only that part of the Jacklin story that has become well documented over the years. The truth behind the confusion surrounding his Alien Brains project and all of the connecting stories about those who got involved has proved more elusive.

A few years back, after many emails and phone calls, I traced Jacklin down to the UK's south coast with the idea of instigating a reissue of some kind, but found out too late that a Swedish label had just beaten me to the final post. Even after trying to coax a positive response to the idea, and passing on offers from other interested parties, it seems that we've just got to settle for the vinyl-edited version of the *Live At The Basement* cassette as the sum total of any legitimate reissue programme. But looking at Jacklin's current domestic setup, it's obvious that Alien Brains was never going to be anything more than an exuberant outburst of youthful nihilism and a slight distraction on his life's path — maybe even a source of embarassment

After a total of six-and-a-half cassette releases, an unreleased recording, and a small handful of live shows, Jacklin moved on and never returned to music after that final cassette done under the name Verdenskang. Yet it seems that everyone who made some contribution to the Alien Brains name and played a role, no matter how minor, had a story to tell from either side of the project's timeline, or just from running alongside the action. Where else is it likely that the names of David Jackman, The Destructors, and Plus Instruments could ever be connected?

Jacklin was a big admirer of Throbbing Gristle's work and had lifted the name Alien Brains from a text on a poster for that band's show at the YMCA in London some seven months before the Oundle School show (although 'Mr. Alien Brain' was also an alias used by P-Orridge during his COUM years).

During his Oundle years Jacklin started recording and making inroads into the network of artists and labels around at the time. He released his first cassette, *Menial Disorders*, which was recorded in the chemistry lab at Oundle School whist he was still a pupil there. He was also friends with other people living in the Peterborough area who knew TG's work, such as punk bass player Allen Adams, an early Alien Brains collaborator. Although the first cassettes are very much Jacklin's solo endeavours, it wasn't until the third release that other hands started to get more thoroughly involved, whether they knew it or not.

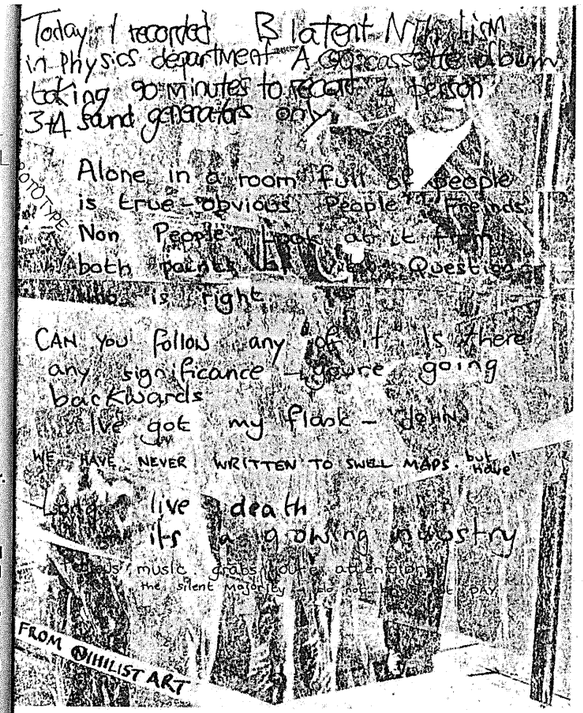
Allen Adams' involvement with the Peterborough Punk scene, which still continues to this day, started in 1977 by taking up a role as the manager for local heroes The Now, whose 'Development Corporations' 7-inch is considered a classic slice of provincial KBD, as was The Blanks' only single, 'Northern Ripper,' which was Adams' introduction on vinyl as the bass player for the band. The Blanks would later undergo a slight line-up change and re-emerge as The Destructors, but kept 'Northern Ripper' in their set list. The Blanks 45 has been re-pressed, and with its 'Wearside Jack' hoax call (1) gives us a view into Adams' tastes. He was well known as being knowledgeable about the works of Throbbing Gristle, and he also attended the invite-only session, a month prior to the Oundle school show, that became TG's third album, *Heathen Earth*. His name can be found on the sleeve.

Adams' lyrical input to The Destructors' songbook brought in the subject matter that had intrigued him from his deep interest in TG, taking in serial killers, chemical weaponry, and concentration camps, subjects which most of the UK's other third-wave Punk outfits wouldn't go anywhere near.

Adams' in-depth interests also included publishing a series of cassettes and pamphlets under the Methods Of Execution moniker, which actually lead to his being picked up by the police and questioned about his possible involvement with the Yorkshire Ripper case (then ongoing but going nowhere fast), but he was released after having strong alibis. Around the same time, he was interviewed, having been plied with beer, for the Sunday People tabloid newspaper. Later on, he also got Genesis P-Orridge to pen the sleeve notes for The Destructors' debut album, *Exercise* [sic] *The Demons Of Youth*, which was released via Illuminated in 1982.

After a move to London to attend college, Jacklin started to meet up with his postal correspondents in person. As a result, Jacklin was an occasional member of Mark Lancaster's Messthetics anti-heroes The Instant Automatons, at times sitting in on drums or guitar when required. He would later become the inspiration for their classic tribute to outsiders, 'Short Haired Man (In A Long Haired Town),' which would turn up on the Deleted Records *Love Not Devotion* compilation album. In direct contrast to the song structures of his own band, Lancaster comments on his involvement as an Alien Brain that he never thought of them as music, but considered them as he assumed Jacklin did, more as "a sort of conceptual art" with the recordings themselves "just the concrete evidence of the 'concept'." Unable to clearly recall the time he first got hooked up with Jacklin, he ponders, "I'm guessing, like a lot of people we knew back then, that Nigel got in touch by sending me a blank cassette for one of the Deleted albums. He turned up at one of our London gigs, I think it was the Acklam Hall one, and asked if he could join in on drums, and, of course, we agreed. After that, we met up at several subsequent gigs, most, if not all, in London as far as I recall, and he sat in on drums, and once at the Clarendon Hotel on guitar for a song or two. When he started recording his own stuff as Alien Brains, I suppose he thought that Deleted Records would be a good outlet, since he could tap into our minuscule but dedicated customer base, a strategy also adopted by Chris Scott and The Teen Vampires. So his *Menial Disorders* came out on Deleted as our fifth release."

The working relationship carried onto the next release, too, with a release on the Fashionable Trousers label. Lancaster states that "The second Alien Brains release was *Blatantly Nihilist*, which came out on the Fashionable Trousers label. Fashionable Trousers was my brain-child, as it was a subsidiary of Deleted Records that was designed to provide a home for recordings that were considered too outré


Today I recorded Blatant Nihilism
in Physics department
Alone in a room full of people
is true-obvious
Non People
CAN you follow any
any significance
backwards
I've got my flask - John
WE HAVE NEVER WRITTEN TO SWELL MAPS. but HAVE
live death
music grabs your attention
FROM NIHILIST ART
Deleted Records Bring You
The Enlightened Eighties
WORDS CANNOT DESCRIBE THEIR MUSIC IT HAS NO SPOKEN PARTS AND NO TITLES NOT EVEN TRACKS JUST EXCERPTS THERE ARE NO COMPARISONS
EYE PROTECTION IS PROVIDED FOR YOUR SAFETY AND MUST BE WORN
ALIEN BRAINS
plus S.A.E.
send a blank C90 cassette to... deleted records, low farm, rigg road, messingham, scunthorpe, south humberside
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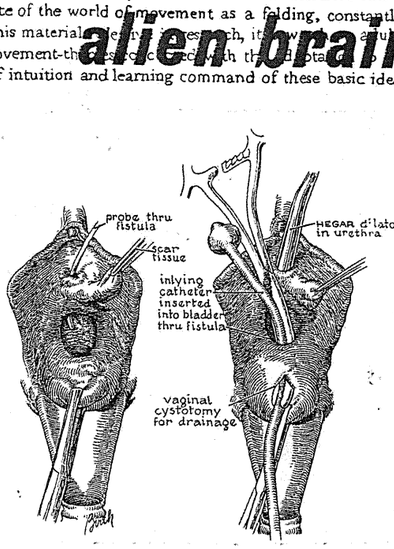
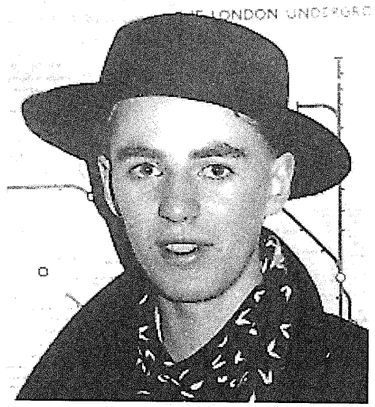

probe thru fistula
scar tissue
HEGAR dilator in urethra
inlying catheter inserted into bladder thru fistula
vaginal cystotomy for drainage

observe the two-dimensional piece of furniture is therefore still important. Laban wrote of the world of movement as a folding, constantly changing manipulates his material ... contained movement-th... coll... the nature of intuition and learning command of these basic ideals, non-spe...

These are simply things which look like little rockets which are pushed into the back p... age. About twenty minutes later you have a normal bowel action. At Boots, when yo... say "You w... understand anyway, listen to the wireless, women are perfectly happ... Now that ... to m... attached. ... baby lying there, still ... breathing ... is ideally the first stage of labour." Where am I dilating nicely vaginal walls at the height of a contraction. I ring the bell and tell whoever comes. But



Nigel Jacklin. London. 1980. Photo by Richard Rupenus

or self-indulgent, even more so than the main label, so Alien Brains fit right in." The cassette was a Jacklin solo recording, recorded in an afternoon in the Oundle School chemistry lab. Lancaster adds, "I really can't remember anything about this cassette and the master tape disappeared many years ago."

The third cassette outing, confusingly titled *Alien Brains IV*, but more commonly known as *Natural Advantages*, was self-released. Lancaster recalls, "That was my only live appearance as part of Alien Brains. I did go on to record material later, along with Nigel and a mutual friend, Su The Vampyre (who was also an occasional backing singer for The Automatons), but these recordings were never released." The opening track on *IV* is actually credited to Absorbers Of Radiation, but there's no clues given on the sleeve about who AOR actually were. This recording also features input from Allen Adams and Jacklin's music teacher, as well as the aforementioned 'various public schoolboys.'

Another key player from the Messthetics era was the singly-named Bendle, better known for his work with The Door And The Window and a friend of Jacklin's from his time spent in London. Again, the confusion about who was actually playing in whose band raises its head here. When asked about the time he played in Alien Brains, Bendle seems to recall that "Nigel might have been drafted in to expand the ranks of either The Door And The Window or The Casual Labourers. I may have played with Alien Brains? Did I?" Recalling Jacklin's time in London he says, "When I knew Nigel, he was living with two Italian women and they lived in several different parts of West London. I remember dangling a microphone from their front window on a long lead to record the conversations of passing people and the miscellaneous street noises. Jacklin had a good quality cassette deck that we recorded onto; in fact, I remember being struck by his high-quality hi-fi on which he would play Industrial music at a very low volume."

Now living in Sheffield, Bendle still fondly recalls the times in London and maintains that aspects of the lifestyle he led still serve him today. The importance of TDATW's work is nowadays common knowledge, and the Messthetics template of poverty-enforced cooperation is one that is still used by today's network of artists and labels. Considering said template's role within both band and scene, Bendle says, "As a youngster having just moved to London, my interests were in Electronic and Industrial music, but in forming a band, the only role model I had was that of a Rock band. I knew little about Jazz but was aware of Jazz musicians' ability to play in different bands, and I had noted the fluid line-ups of the Improv groups at the LMC (London Musicians' Collective)." Obviously making a big impact on his own approach, he goes on to say that "Nag and I decided, early in the history of TDATW, that this was a good way to progress. We described our ethos as 'permanent transience,' in that we kept on changing set lists, actual songs and the band's line-up. We had no great desire to put a brand name on our activities, as we were more interested in living experiences rather than selling them, and so we got involved in all sorts of musical activities with various people. In London, the bands would pool equipment such as PA stuff and recording equipment, and would share band gear to help each other out. We were loaned equipment from 23 Skidoo and Nurse With Wound, and a friend gave me an electric guitar. We, in turn, passed on tools to other people rather than sell them. We also co-promoted gigs, and if offered a place on the bill would ask if there was room for our mates, too. Some things never change!"

Alien Brains live performances were sporadic affairs, very few and far between. The second performance was given on the campus grounds whilst Jacklin was studying at Ealing College in London. Having made contact with Wally van Middendorp of the Dutch label Plurex Records (he was also the main man in The Minny Pops) with a plan of travelling to Holland to interview people related to the label for a possible fanzine feature, Jacklin did the third Alien Brains show on New Year's Eve of 1980 at one of the 'Ultra' nights (Ultra being a Dutch take on No Wave) at the Oktopus venue organized by van Middendorp and members of The Young Lions. It was a solo performance, but Jacklin was joined towards the end by Harold Schellinx and a couple of members of Nasmak. Of the show, Schellinx recalls, "Nigel was awfully fond of effect pedals and echo and would use all the echo machines he could lay his hands on."

The Young Lions were Harold Schellinx's group. They had the 'No News, Strange Rumours' 12-inch, released by the Plurex label. Nasmak + Instruments were actually two groups who worked closely together. Jacklin visited Plus Instruments' Truus de Groot in Eindhoven and recorded some material there. After records on Plurex and the German label Zick Zack, de Groot later moved to New York and recorded another Plus Instruments album featuring Sonic Youth's Lee Ranaldo in the ranks. Some of the recordings made during Jacklin's visit to Holland appeared on the fourth Alien Brains cassette, *Der Blaunk Teps*. A snippet of the work with Plus Instruments also appeared on the third Snatch Tapes compilation.

Schellinx moved to London for a few months during 1981 to share a house with Jacklin and other friends, but towards the end of the year Jacklin was to move up to Aberdeen. It was there that he would carry out the fourth Alien Brains performance. Having gotten in with the local Arts Centre, he convinced them to allow him to do an Alien Brains show which was carried out one Saturday afternoon to an audience of old-age pensioners and children who were there for the weekly 'Tea & Company' gathering. Certainly an odd event with no one apart from the group (expanded to feature the Rupenus brothers) having a clue what was going on. A snippet from this show can be found on one of the early Assembly Generale compilation tapes issued by the French label PPP. Richard Rupenus had made mail contact with Jacklin early in 1980 while Jacklin was still a pupil at Oundle School, having obtained *Menial Disorders* via Deleted Records. Rupenus first met Jacklin in London early in 1980, after which the Rupenus brothers would become another temporary element of the Alien Brains.

The most readily available document of the Alien Brains' existence is the *Live At The Basement* cassette released by Aeon. That c90 is a document of the group's fifth performance, held in Newcastle on Valentines Day, 1982. The show was booked by Richard Rupenus, as he had been impressed by a performance he witnessed there by The Event Group. Like Alien Brains, performances held by The Event Group were carried out by a rotating line-up and comprised both performance and music. (The Event Group were well-known for, among other things, carrying out shows dressed in traditional Cricket whites!) For this reason, the audio documentation of this performance should be considered only part of the whole event. The Basement performance may have been more memorable if the group's intentions went ahead as planned. Jacklin explains, "A few days beforehand, we went to buy some fish heads to leave on the floor of the venue, but unfortunately they went off very quickly, and as we had an hour-long bus ride to the venue, we didn't take them. Instead we had some other chemical smells." The Swedish label Tub Of Guts released an edited version of the Basement show as a limited vinyl album a couple of years back. Jacklin points out that "Very few people came, but even fewer came to some of our other events." The group had been extended by the addition of Neal Purvis for this performance, too. The vinyl re-issue is now the only scrap of Alien Brains evidence readily available.

After making the move back to London, another Alien Brains show was arranged at the Centro Iberico — a disused school-cum-squat that was run by Spanish anarchists — and again the line-up featured the Rupenus brothers, Neal Purvis, and this time adding Philip Sanderson of The Storm Bugs. The gig itself was poorly attended (as usual, very little publicity was done), but the group were met there by Steve Stapleton, John Fothergill (both of Nurse With Wound) and Ralf Wehowsky (of P16.D4). Wehowsky was in London to arrange the artwork for the *Masse Mensch* compilation with Stapleton. This show was followed up by another cassette, *British Interiors*, a collection taken from the previously released tapes along with edits from various live performances and other previously unreleased material. A final tape called *U.S.E. (Unusual Social Embraces)* was due, but never got a release. Another cassette, this time a split release and entitled *Totentanz*, was released around this time, but the details about who released it and even who was on the other side of the tape remain sketchy.

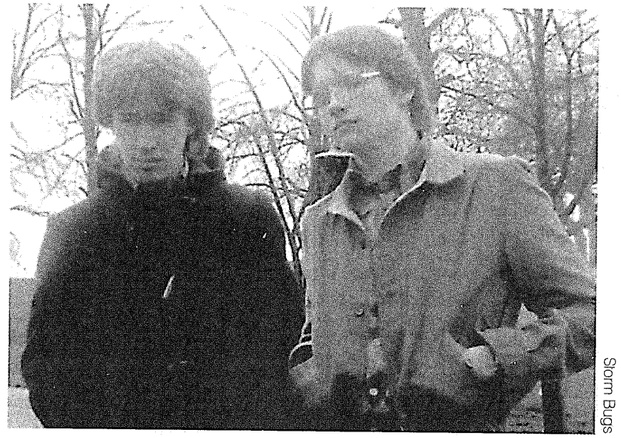
Philip Sanderson was living in Paddington around 1980, in "a rather run down basement close to the station" as he recalls, when Jacklin turned up on his doorstep one Saturday afternoon after finding the address for Snatch Tapes (Sanderson's label) in the weekly music papers. After becoming friends, discussions started about collaboration works.

The final live performance was held at a disused public swimming-baths in Notting Hill, London, and edits of the show were later mixed into the Verdenskang (effectively an Alien Brains recording in everything but name) cassette *And It's There*, issued by the Italian label ADN during 1985. Also included was an excerpt from the Last Chance Centre show, a London venue where Alien Brains had carried out their second-to-last performance. On this occasion, Jacklin was accompanied by Sanderson and Organum's David Jackman, but when asked about his involvement, Jackman responds that he hardly knew Nigel, and only met him through Sanderson. As for the performance Jackman simply states; What Alien Brains show! Whether this is indicative of Jackman's legendary disdain for the music press, we'll never know. As there was little publicity for the show, few turned up to witness it. Richard Rupenus has a different recollection of events, claiming that Jackman played a solo performance before the trio of Jacklin, Sanderson and Jackman played, which brings us full circle as to what and who actually constituted an Alien Brains show.

By this time, Jacklin had nearly finished with music but put together some final Verdenskang recordings to be used as a source material for the Mixed Band Philanthropist album, *The Impossible Humane*, issued by Selektion in 1986. Sanderson would go on to be one of Jacklin's longest-running collaborators. Like Jacklin, he had been drawn onto the circuit by listening to the works of Throbbing Gristle and John Cage, and like Jacklin enjoyed "mainstream stuff like disco," too. About the day that Jacklin turned up on the Snatch Tapes doorstep, Sanderson recalls, "We were having a party that night and I had blown my speakers by using them to make recordings, so Nigel offered to lend me his speakers for the night, and that was it, really; we became friends for the next 14 years or so." This introduction was followed by plenty of collaboration work, but nothing was released under the Alien Brains banner, only on the Verdenskang cassette.

"Music-wise, we did do quite a lot of things, though never in a very formal way — it was a complete contrast to working with [David] Jackman, which would always be very full-on — Nigel was very laid back about it all," Sanderson states before adding that, "We were both still students at the time, though I long since stopped attending the course I was meant to be on and spent most of my time in the electronic music studio at Goldsmiths, whilst he was quite diligent about his studies (on the quiet)."

The few live appearances mostly caused the scratching of heads. Says Sanderson, "On that Verdenskang cassette, there is an extract from a live gig, possibly the Centro Iberico one with myself, Steven Ball [the other half of the Storm Bugs duo] and a few others playing. This would have been around 1982. Similarly, a live gig Nigel and I did at Ealing College, also in 1982, in front of a bemused crowd of students is at the end of side one of that cassette. Another ad-hoc session with myself, Nigel, and the Rupenus brothers which involved throwing around some pipes in the basement of the Centro Iberico, I think, is also on there, as are recordings Nigel made with Jackman at a school he was working at at that time. After the performance at the disused swimming pool, somewhere off Westbourne Grove, our last ever 'concert' was to an audience of ourselves down at the sound mirrors in Dungeness (2) back in about 1990," the latter being an excuse for an adventure more than an attempt at performance. As the decade closed, Sanderson says, "Nigel and I still saw each other pretty much every other weekend, but we spent far more time drinking than making music. By now Nigel was getting into his business career and was well paid, and I was signing on [for unemployment benefits] and always broke, and then I wasted a year in about 1985 recording crap pop music with an old friend of Nigel's before coming to my senses and going down to IPS to do some decent stuff again.


Storm Bugs

Storm Bugs would, alongside the cassettes they released on their own Snatch Tapes (interestingly, the label was warned against using the name by the management team of Patti Palladin and Judy Nylon's band Snatch, based in New York) go on to have two singles issued. Both would have issues regarding the sleeves. The cover of the second one ('Metamorphose,' L'Invitation Au Suicide, 1981) had Nazi-associated artwork used on it at the discretion of the label and much to the band's dismay, so much so they urged buyers to get rid of the sleeves. The first EP ('Table Manners,' Loop, 1980) has gone on to be a major collectable artifact from that era. The record components took so long to get together at the production stage that they ended up selling it without the sleeve, as the band needed to recoup the student grant used to fund the release, instead placing an A3 insert with the record printed by Sanderson's then-girlfriend, who also added occasional contributions to the Storm Bugs sound. A couple of months later, the actual sleeves turned up. From the original pressing of 500 copies, the first 50 or so only have the insert as artwork, which was replaced by the cover for the rest of the press run.

Thanks largely to an appearance on the *I Hate The Pop Group* compilation LP, a wave of interest was generated that has resulted in most of the Storm Bug archives being available to the public again, mostly via Vinyl-On-Demand and Fusetron Records.

Unlike the archival work displayed in preserving the Storm Bugs discography, it seems that Alien Brains will forever remain buried, along with all remaining scraps of truth about the project and any evidence of their music. The attempts at demystification have all fallen flat as time passes, raising far more questions than answers. Jacklin remains uninterested in digging up the history and is adamant that reissues won't surface, thus allowing the cassettes to go onto a higher cult status amongst collectors, the worth of the actual contents diminishing against the obscurity value of the physical object. Blatantly nihilist, indeed. No history, no info, no recordings, no nothing.

Recommended Reading:
Philip Sanderson interview by Ed Pinsent,
The Sound Projector #16, 2008

Recommended Available Listening:
Storm Bugs - Let's Go Outside and Get it Over
(Snatch Tapes, CD, 2001)
The Door And The Window - Detailed Twang
(Overground, CD, 2003)
The Instant Automatons - Another Wasted Sunday
Afternoon (Hyped to Death, CD, 2005)
The Destructors - Punk Singles Collection
(Captain Oi, CD, 2006)

Footnotes:

(1) Wearside Jack hoax: In 1979, at the height of the police investigation into the Yorkshire Ripper case, John Samuel Humble sent a tape to the police claiming to be the Yorkshire Ripper. Police investigators, focusing on the Wearside accent of the person speaking on the tape, investigated approximately 40,000 men from the Sunderland area, where the Wearside accent is most prominent. Because the real Yorkshire Ripper was based in Bradford, almost 80 miles away, the prank was considered a significant diversion of police investigation resources. When Humble was finally identified and arrested in 2005, he was found a broken man, driven to alcoholism and multiple suicide attempts due to his persistent guilt about the prank. In 2006, Humble was sentenced to eight years in prison.

(2) Acoustic sound mirrors: Large concrete edifices, built in the 1920s and '30s along the English coast as a form of primitive radar. Built into shapes that one might now recognize as a radar dish or satellite dish (the mirrors at Dungeness have multiple shapes including a long, curved wall of concrete, a testament to the still-experimental nature of the process), the sound mirrors were fitted with microphones, the large, dish-like shapes meant to pick up and amplify the sounds of incoming enemy aircraft. Although quite ingenious in their design in the 1920s (they could not only detect distance, but also direction of incoming aircraft), the technology all but obsolete by the 1930s, when newer, faster aircraft meant that incoming planes would arrive too quickly for the sound mirrors to act as a useful warning system.

lets the victims come to HIM, Kmet fully goes on the offensive here, using a volcanic, histrionic approach that I associate more with UKers Con-Dom and the Grey Wolves. A good harbinger for violent, nasty times ahead!

Syzmic Records introduces the first new Climax Denial release of 2009, titled *Impulse*. Like *The Absolute Bottom*, *Impulse* works the more hostile side of Kmet's persona, his 'shouting at the cops from the edge of my property' vocals getting their full due here, along with a number of tracks ('Harem Cult,' 'Chasing the Void') that feature two and three vocal parts layered over each other, a variety of vocal processing and mic distances making for dizzying listens. The synths are dirty and crunching for the most part, but 'Tiny Pleasure' indulges a bit more of Kmet's taste of ambient textures, though a tempered-steel ambience to be sure, like thin plates of steel coasting on turgid air. The tape ends with the title track, including someone counting to ten (perhaps an allusion to the sample on Side One, in which a mistress orders her submissive to cum on the side of the house during a backyard party while she counts down from ten) and Kmet's repeated chant of 'There's no crime/like a sex crime,' like Dorothy at the end of *The Wizard of Oz*. A fine, strong tape that builds on *Bottom*'s ferociousness, and obviously paves the way for Kmet's new label of the same name.

The debut for Kmet's own Sexkrime Arts label, *Escapism* is packaged in an oversized ziploc bag with black and white art. It's smaller than the Slaughter Productions/Old Europa Café style, but larger than the early Spite tapes. The tape definitely sounds like a Type I bias, and the tape hiss is immediately noticeable, presumably intending to emphasize the 'old-school garbage' sound that Kmet so loves and fetishizes. Unfortunately, *Escapism*'s material is created with slicker, more polished sounds, coated with a shimmering, liquid-mercury layer that would be better rendered with a high-bias tape. I don't understand why Kmet wouldn't compose with some of his dirtier sounds if lo-fi death industrial was the intention — other releases, like *Lake Winds* and *Disgust* prove that he has the firepower at his disposal. There's a lot of interesting details hidden in a miasma of spiraling layers of hiss and feedback, but they're not quite clear enough to discern, but too clear to just be an old-school trepanation. Side One's two tracks, 'Will She Pose?' and 'Squatting Soles,' have elements similar to *Impulse*, with a few shimmery, far-off vocals in the layer din, but are mostly lacking in power or dynamic. Side Two's 'The Worst Kind of Man' is more of a throbbing texture study, with creepy, cinematic synth swells, tomb atmospherics, and ringing ambiences rising up amidst a turgid storm of hissy white static. Not a bad tape, but as a debut for his new label/endeavor, I'd have given Syzmic the master to this one and kept *Impulse* for myself.

AS LOUD AS POSSIBLE: In my opinion, it feels like your *Fragile Grace* album has a story or theme running through it (though I can't tell for sure without lyrics, as the vocal processing can get pretty incomprehensible sometimes). By comparison, *Basement Bruises* feels more like a notebook of ideas than an album with a connecting thread (it's still excellent, it just has a different feel to it, very disjointed). Do your albums have themes or recurring motifs, or are they presented as a series of discrete tracks that were all recorded around the same time?

ALEX KMET, CLIMAX DENIAL: My mother always told me that the most interesting music is the music that tells a story. There is always something of a theme running through my head when I'm working on an album, whether it's apparent to the listener or not. There is a story running through *Basement Bruises*, there is a story running through *Fragile Grace*, but I'm not trying to beat anyone over the head with it. It's personal. I know some tracks from one tape would never work if you put them in with some other tape; they are bound to whatever nasty little thing was poking my brain enough to force me to record an album.

ALAP: What is your process for collecting ideas/material for an album? Does it happen fairly quickly after an initial idea, or do albums consist of material gathered over a longer period?

CD: I have gone months without recording anything at all, there are releases that have taken months to complete, and I've recorded an entire release in one day on more than one occasion. I have no set process. It just takes some idea to inspire me and then I build off that at whatever rate ideas some to me. There is always an instigator. A sexual abuse story on the news, a glimpse up a skirt, sexual abuse in my living room, a visit to the hospital, who knows. My eyes are always open. My mouth is always open. If you want to try an experiment, find me at a show and have a chick with scoliosis give me a handjob or break another girl's ankle or something, see how quickly a Climax Denial tape comes out. That will answer you question more accurately.

ALAP: Are you are the protagonist in your tracks, or do you make up a character or persona for some/all of your tracks?

CD: With few exceptions, the tracks are about specific events in my life. Sometimes exaggerated, sometimes not. If I have to make up a character, it's just myself acting out some masturbatory hallucination.

ALAP: The decision to do Power Electronics from the perspective of sexual and/or emotional submission feels pretty radical to me. Was this something you were interested in anyway, or was it a conscious attempt to take Power Electronics in another direction?

CD: I've never consciously set out to become a 'Power Electronics Musician' or whatever, it's just like I was saying before, I always want there to be some kind of context behind the noise. Most power electronics deals with exploring the dark side of human nature objectively, or confessing your own darknesses. I write about what I know. I just have to be honest. These things are what I'm into doing and this is what keeps me up at night and this is what turns me on. Mostly what turns me on! It was never a conscious attempt to change the genre. I've just done whatever I wanted to from the beginning, trying to avoid falling completely into any one category. It's sexual and emotional submission with fits of violence. It's the degradation of my self to fully experience the essence of the female sex. It's the severe depression and it's knowing I'm better and stronger than most other people for being able to see things the way I see them.

ALAP: Is a 'fit of violence' a sign of weakness in a submissive? Doesn't that constitute 'breaking character?'

CD: There is no definition I can deliver here. You think you have my character figured out? I sure don't. I make music based on whatever I'm feeling at that exact moment. We're all switches in the S&M vulgarity of daily life. There is no safe-word, you just have to do whatever is necessary to achieve satisfaction. I always feel some sort of glory when I'm performing, no matter what the theme of the song may be. Self-contradiction is not something I'm afraid of.

ALAP: Is there a story behind the *Lake Winds* 3-inch CDr? The images are very provocative and intriguing by their proximity to one another (naked and emaciated woman, serpent tracks in the desert).

CD: This is sort of what I was trying to say before about this role of submission. *Lake Winds* is about crawling on your belly to get what you want. Degradation or humiliation with a self-serving goal in mind. In the end the one with the power looks like the fool. I won't say any more about it. The story isn't very interesting.

ALAP: Do you have an opinion one way or the other about finding your stuff on Soulseek or other free file-sharing sites? Are your limited releases limited for a reason, i.e. only 25 people should be hearing this, or is it a 'do what you've gotta do' situation?

CD: I still don't know that there are more than 25 people who would really care to hear my work! I don't really give a fuck one way or the other if people download my 'rare' releases; if you don't have the original, you're not really experiencing it fully. I do appreciate the creation of a fetish item, but it's usually a smaller edition due to money issues or the general disinterest of the public.

ALAP: You've recorded a split with Craniopagus, who with you seem to be forming a new school of PE bands that have sprung up in the last year or two (the *Total Gape* comp might be this generation's *Axis Sally*, if not its *Neuengamme*). Why do you think new-school Power Electronics (stuff like Storm & Stress, White Heterosexuals, Yellow Tears, Halflings, Cathode Terror Secretion, Peter J. Woods, New Pledgemaster, etc.) has taken off so quickly recently among new fans of noise?

CD: Did you notice how most of these bands sprung up only after the Broken Flag box set came out? I was approached a while back to be on some compilation with the invitation mentioning their intent to 'make it look like a Broken Flag comp.' I'm not on that release. Nothing against Broken Flag at all, I only exist in tribute to myself. Very few of these acts are actually doing anything worth paying attention to, save for two off the top of my head, Craniopagus [R.I.P.] and Peter J. Woods [formerly Raperies (Like Draperies)]. Not to mention the tireless efforts of Mark Solotroff, a real hero of the past, present, and future. I'm not interested in being a part of this new school, or any school. Give it a few months, you'll see a lot of these acts drop off the planet when the next trend comes along. Some of it sounds good, some doesn't, some of it is mildly interesting, most isn't, it just doesn't seem very honest to me. Not very honest at all. Why is it becoming so popular? Because this scene will always be into dudes screaming about drug problems and prostitute violence, with subtle imagery toying around with fascism... and when it comes down to it, I am alright with that!

ALAP: Your Violent Whatever label initially released two excellent tapes, one a split between you and the Italian dark ambient project Corpoparassita and a tape by fellow Milwaukeean Raperies (Like Draperies). How were these tapes received?

CD: I haven't ever done much to advertise anything I've put out, so there hasn't been much feedback, (until now?) but I'm proud of what I've done. Following these was a tape from Massachusetts native Ichorous, entitled *Biohorror*. Around the same time was a private release that you may or may not have ever heard anything about entitled Ten Little Piggies, catering to a very specific crowd, as you can imagine. I had never intended for VWE to become a major presence in the current vast sea of noise labels, and it most likely never will be. It was a vehicle for me to spend time creating something for a project that I feel very strongly about.

ALAP: The *Desire for Disease* tape certainly fits the definition of 'beautiful' fetish-related items! Did you have a hand in creating the package, or was that mostly the label-owner's doing?

CD: Aldo [Volpe, of Nil By Mouth] contacted me about releasing a Climax Denial tape. The pink bag and teenybopper theme were his idea, based on similar aesthetics I've used on my Myspace page and elsewhere. The only hand I had in the packaging was picking out the girlie pictures for the inserts. It's probably the best packaging of any of my releases and I'm very grateful for the hard work that was put into it.

ALAP: Did the tour you did with Bloodyminded, Silvum, and Charlie Draheim affect your working methods at all? Any desire to tour again? You manage to pick up any new 'contacts' on the road?

CD: It didn't much affect my working methods; it was just a 10-day party for me. I was working with gear that never wanted to cooperate completely, so each show was a bit of a struggle. But that's how I've always operated. Sometimes I achieve brilliance and sometimes I fall short, but it's always a uniquely inebriated experience. Another tour is in talks at the moment. We'll hopefully make it out west this time, where I have never played. I always meet a bunch of great people on tour, it is for sure the best way to make connections and contacts and very special friends! But only if I'm drunk. Otherwise I probably won't talk to anybody. It's better that way. Probably the strangest contact I made on this last tour was meeting Azoikum in a basement in Akron, Ohio!

ALAP: Recently, you've officially put Violent Whatever to rest, and have started a new tape label, Sexkrime Arts. Could you tell us a bit about the change in focus from one to the other? Why did you feel the need to make a break from VWE?

CD: I had big intentions for VWE, but lost focus, lost interest. I loved the stupid name and how most people hated it, and I'm happy to have released some fine tapes. I took about a year off from self-releasing anything before I got the bug again in early 2009. After much deliberation, I decided to drop VWE altogether and start fresh under a new banner, something that I felt more sincerely about. I will admit that with VWE, there was a little bit of the 'Everyone else can have a label, so why shouldn't I?' influence, and I realized that while debating whether or not to put VWE to bed and start Sexkrime. Keep doing more of the same with minimal motivation? No, start anew, with greater focus and intentions from the start; "Everyone else has a label but mine will be the only one that matters."

ALAP: Your first releases on Sexkrime Arts include your own project, as well as two lesser-known projects, Reptile Worship and Pink Sexdeath. Tell us a bit about these projects, how you came to hear about them, and how they represent a new direction for your label activities.

CD: Sexkrime Arts' motto is 'Extreme Industrial Electronics,' and that is what I release. I don't care to get into the debate over the term 'Industrial,' but I feel it is an important word to reclaim, and it defines the sound I am interested in releasing better than 'Noise.' The first two tapes on my label demonstrate this even though they vary in sound greatly. Reptile Worship is a duo from Wisconsin who create crushing and dark, thickly-layered noise. Really dedicated and professional guys, not just fucking around. They're operating under the radar for now, but these guys will get the attention they deserve soon. Pink Sexdeath is a mysterious young man from the Russian Federation, strongly influenced, nay, obsessed with true Industrial music. His *I Wanna Fuck You* cassette on Sexkrime contains some of the most truly bizarre, creepy and baffling death-electronics I have ever heard. Future releases will include work from Anal Hearse, Blådåre, Rape-X, Pestis, Exploring Jezebel, and, probably being released before this interview is published, Corporate Park, J/O, and Custodian. Each artist has a unique take on industrial music, but share the same bleak reportage of the modern world. Expression of anxiety though electronics. No flowery drone, no mathematical cut-up, no art-school PE, no generic guitar noodling. I have a single narrow path in mind for this label, and it is going to be a breath of fresh air for this choking Noise culture.

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CHEAPMACHINES

PHIL JULIAN INTERVIEWED
BY STEVE UNDERWOOD

For well over a decade now, Phil Julian has been the quiet man in the underbelly of London's experimental music circuit and without a doubt one of the busiest. Working under the name of Cheapmachines, he has played and organised many shows within the UK's capital city as well as releasing a range of material, mostly via the cassette and CDr formats but with a fast-expanding internet archive, including a diverse selection of collaborative works and split releases with artists ranging from 16 Bitch Pile-Up to Tomas Korber. He actively avoids an easy allegiance with any one particular school of sound-work, and his project engages in activities ranging from installations and live soundtracks to collaborations with improv ensembles, right down to playing the occasional poverty-struck noise gig held in the basement of some dire bar. He has a simple, no-fuss approach to performances, most of them motionless in the glare of a laptop screen; this lack of pretense is reflected in the workload he takes on as well. Whilst others attempt to place importance on gaining some public recognition through their works, Phil Julian puts his head down and gets on with the job. Only recently, after a couple of vinyl appearances, has he seen his debut CD, entitled *Secede*, released by the overlooked London-based label Entr'acte.

AS LOUD AS POSSIBLE: **One of the things I really appreciate about your Cheapmachines work is that it avoids getting stuck in all-too-easy cliques due to its diversity; one week, you'll be doing an installation or a live soundtrack, the week after you'll be playing with the likes of Filthy Turd or The A-Band. Is this an intentional ploy to avoid pigeonholes, or are you just a workaholic?**

PHIL JULIAN, CHEAPMACHINES: **It's really just a case of being open-minded, setting up situations where interesting things can happen and trying to keep it as varied as possible so as not to get bored with what I'm doing.**

Unlike quite a few people I've encountered, both artist and audience, I don't make any distinction between experimental music that is 'serious' or 'academic' in some way, and work that owes more to a DIY/punk/noise aesthetic. Bottom line for me is whether it's interesting or not. I've heard people in all seriousness comment on my work and say things like, "nah, I'm not really into all that clever shit," as if to say that if there's any specific thought behind something, then it's less interesting or dishonest somehow.

When I started recording as Cheapmachines ten or more years ago, the idea was to hopefully avoid any sort of signature sound and anything that could be tagged to a genre or any obvious way of working. You can't really avoid being pigeonholed ultimately, but I think if you're being honest about what you do and work in an intuitive way, the compartment you end up in really doesn't mean anything.

There's very little audience expectation regarding my work. A number of listeners like certain elements of what I do and are not the slightest bit interested in others (e.g. "I like your drone stuff, but not that noise thing you did," or vice-versa). I'm not in a situation where the next release has to be bigger or better somehow than the one before. Anything can happen.

ALAP: **Do you feel that diversity perhaps stops you gaining a wider recognition for your work, then?**

CM: **To a certain extent. I think the climate in experimental music is quite conservative at the moment and has been for a few years. I don't see or hear many people taking any chances. Ultimately, there's not enough experimentation going on in the experimental music world. It seems to be most people's ambition to deliberately paint themselves into a corner to make it easier for other people to follow what's going on, or set up some sort of vague 'career path,' for want of a better description.**

I think it could be that I don't really fit easily into any of the seemingly prescribed 'scenes' that are prevalent. I'm generalizing a bit here, obviously, but record labels that release work with a specific stylistic theme don't really want to take a chance where money is scarce to start with. Gig organisers and promoters sometimes have difficulty placing me with like-sounding bands or artists, as I'm usually too abrasive for the drone crowd, not full-on enough and a bit too arty for the noise audience, and not a card-carrying improviser, either, but I'm not complaining at all. If the choice is to continue to have the luxury to be able to experiment freely with sound and perhaps remain slightly obscure as a result, or to hit on one sound or method of working and hammer that for a dozen releases in order to pull an audience, then it's an easy call to make.

ALAP: **Do you see your work moving in any particular direction? Is the idea of progression, personal advancement or any sense of ambition ever a conscious consideration for you?**

CM: **Not even remotely. If anything, I think I'd find that a complete hindrance to what I'm doing. I can't imagine I'd last too long if I had to worry about career advancement or what someone may like or dislike about what I was working on. As long as I find it interesting, that's all that counts in the final analysis. Cheapmachines was never supposed to be just one way of doing things. It can be anything. I think the best way of working is to assume that no one is listening.**

ALAP: **Cheapmachines seems very much to be a 'web presence'-based project, with a large portion of the work being available via downloads/MP3s. Do you feel this approach is better suited to your works, and how much has your outlook changed over the last ten years regarding the distribution of that work?**

CM: **It was never actually intended to be that way, and, strangely enough, I've only had access to what I would call a 'decent' computer set-up in the last couple of years. Hardly cutting-edge. Being able to upload and download files quickly is still a bit of a novelty, in fact.**

The only thing that's really changed over the years is the speed of operations, so where I was hand-dubbing tapes to put in the post along with photocopied artwork, now I'm using the web to send sound files and digital images. Using the web as a means to distribute recordings, etc. is really just a matter of convenience. If I have a recording that I'm happy with and want to make it available, the quickest way is to use the internet. With the best will in the world, no label would be able to release anything as quickly; I've had recordings sitting waiting to be released on a CDr for two years or more in the past, which means that everything that comes out is already out-of-date. I don't want my releases to represent old ideas. Where each thing you release is an experiment in some way, the time it takes for 'physical' releases to appear can be a bit of a hindrance.

I was also finding that quite a few of the smaller tape and CDr labels that released my work were vanishing, as the shelf-life for hobbyist experimental/noise labels isn't great, due to lack of time, money, enthusiasm that wanes, etc. Also, quite a few of my titles were on limited release runs for financial reasons and were selling out, so there was a situation a year or so ago where, although I'd been releasing things for ten years, there wasn't much of my back catalogue left for anyone to hear. That's why there's now the archive area on the Cheapmachines website where those deleted or sold-out releases can be freely downloaded. Not everything I release will end up in the archive, however, as some releases don't lend themselves to be made available in this way, particularly where the original package or sleeve artwork is an important part of the release.

ALAP: **Collaborations seems to be a common thread running through your discography. Any reasoning behind this approach? How vital is 'networking' for you? I'm thinking specifically of your internet-based contact points here.**

CM: **I like situations where I don't know exactly what's going to happen or where the finished result is slightly beyond my control. I think when you work on your own for most of the time, you can start to get lazy with what you're doing, or start to play it a bit safe, or repeat yourself, if you're not too careful. It's good to introduce someone else into the situation and have their influence on the finished piece. I wouldn't say collaborating is 'vital,' but you do learn quite a bit about your own work and practices through this sort of interaction.**

Networking via the web is, again, only really a faster version of I what I used to do with a pen and paper and an address out of a fanzine, or off the back of an album cover. Myspace serves its purpose for me in terms of being able to get information to people quickly. Beyond that, it's a mess. Same goes for internet forums and bulletin boards. All these things have their drawbacks, but in terms of the rapid dissemination of information, they are extremely useful tools.

ALAP: **Can you explain your recording methods? Do you start to record once you have a fully formed idea, or do you take a more improvised approach from the outset?**

CM: **This has changed fairly recently. I used to record pretty much all the time, but without any particular overall theme or concept in mind for final tracks -- it was just a case of relying on instinct and keeping anything on tape or on the computer that sounded interesting. Once I had what seemed to be enough raw recorded sections, I would then start to layer, edit, and so on until I had a finished track. So the approach was more 'sculptural,' for want of a better word, than anything else.**

That changed about three years ago when I decided to approach recording in a more improvised way. I like to work fairly quickly on a recording in order to keep some life intact in the finished piece. Improvising allows for accidents and chance to play a part in the recordings which was missing before; some of the early recordings suffer from being a bit 'overly-controlled,' I think. I was finding that I was often getting stuck over-listening to a piece, or bogged down with hundreds of tiny edits, so I felt a different approach was called for.

ALAP: **It's obvious that your recordings aren't 'about' anything, but are you trying to express any specific ideas or concepts, or convey any particular message with your work?**

CM: **No. Being that the recordings are 'abstract' in form, what one person hears will be completely different to the experience that someone else would bring to it. For that reason, I consciously try not to load meaning onto a piece, or steer people in any particular direction. It may seem blasé or flippant, but generally what you can hear is exactly what it is. Very, very occasionally during recording, a theme or a concept will present itself, but it is usually fairly personal and wouldn't be of any interest to anyone else. Track and album titles are usually there just to provide useful points of reference.**

I think nearly all good music is overwhelming in some way. That's not to say 'loud,' necessarily. Very quiet, understated recordings can achieve this as much as a massive wall of noise. If I aim for anything at all with my recorded output, it would be to create an environment where the sound becomes the complete focal point, to occupy the space that it's given. I'm not interested in creating background music.

ALAP: **Your first work was done back in 1997. Where did the initial motivation to get involved with experimental music come from?**

CM: **There were some recordings made quite a few years before 1997, but most were discarded. They were more like test recordings. 1997 was when I actually started to bother marking up cassettes and reels with dates and track titles, so I tend to use this as a start date.**

I'm not from any sort of musical background and I can't really play any conventional instruments. I can find my way around the basic guitar chords, but that's probably the sum total of my traditional musical ability. I used to mess around with tape recorders and radios as a kid, and I had a misspent youth hanging around second-hand record shops, buying up anything that was cheap or looked curious. A good qualification was usually something vaguely offensive or odd on the cover, really long or really short tracks, or if there was a strange combination of instruments being played on them. Nobody else wanted that sort of thing at the time, and they seemed to have much more life to them than anything the Top 40 was churning out.

I had a guitar at home which I was starting to get bored with, and somewhere along the line, I must have heard something from the record bargain bins that made me think, "I wonder what would happen if I tried something like that..." I can't really narrow it down to one thing or one recording. I know I became aware fairly quickly that you could seemingly do absolutely anything you wanted to on a record, which was a pretty exciting concept. You didn't have to be a 'good' musician, be in a band, have a record deal or even worry about what you looked like. You just needed an interesting idea. So that was the initial push to try something of my own, just to try and set up a situation where I could experiment and see what would happen.

ALAP: **Since 2004, you've made regular live appearances in the UK, Europe and the US. How does live performance feature in what appears to be largely a studio-based recording project? It doesn't seem to be an important part of your work, despite numerous performances mentioned above.**

CM: **I can't imagine that performing live will ever be an absolutely vital part of what I'm doing. I do enjoy the experience of playing live, but the compromises that nearly always have to be made in terms of sound quality mean that it often ends up being something of a half measure. I've always had a problem with how to present my work live because I'm not a natural performer; I don't really have an 'act,' as such, so there's nothing to look at. I've taken to playing in complete darkness, or in some cases, when this is not possible, out of the sight of the audience, which itself can make for some interesting spectator reactions. I've done one or two live sets where I'm not even in the same building, or the same country, as where the gig is taking place, either via web-streaming or some sort of pre-prepared or live generative work. I quite like the idea of the role of anonymity in live performance.**

ALAP: **Back to the recordings. What is your 'relationship' with your work after it has been completed? Do you ever go back and listen to the material, and do you have any personal favorites within your catalogue?**

CM: **I very rarely go back and revisit the structured recordings once they are complete, but that's usually because the editing process can be quite involved, so I've already listened to it a few times by the time of its release. I usually feel fairly dis-**

London. 2010

located from a recording once it's finished. I do go back over the more improvised pieces, as obviously the decision about whether those recordings should be released or not happens quite a while after the recording session, and you need some time to digest those pieces. It was interesting to go back over the early stuff when I was preparing it for the online archive. Some of it stands up better than I had expected, which was gratifying and quite surprising. 'Flaunt' works quite well from a structural point of view. I'm also pleased with the drone pieces 'Fugue Cycle' and 'Transit.' They were both pieces where I had a fairly clear idea of what I wanted before I started to work on them, and I think I got fairly close to what I was after. Contrary to popular belief, I don't release everything just because it's complete. There's a raft of substandard releases out there...the world certainly doesn't need more.

ALAP: In that case, do you not subscribe to the concept that by releasing everything, you are providing an ongoing, chronological 'documentary' of your activities? Surely this would help provide a more coherent picture of what Cheapmachines is about for the listener?

CM: Quite a few recording artists seem to go down this route, but it's not something that interests me. Most of the time, it just smacks of laziness and shoddy quality control. I'm not very interested in a 'coherent' back-catalogue, just an interesting one. Some people seem to steer clear of it, but I always use the word 'experimental' with regards to the recording, as to me, it implies not only a sense of freedom, but also a certain amount of failure. It's no good pretending that everything you come up with is a masterpiece and demands someone's attention. Only I know if a recording is a success or not, and that can be quite at odds to what a record label, reviewer or listener regards as what constitutes an interesting piece of music.

ALAP: During the course of this interview and all the talk about internet releases you've finally gone and had an actual, physical CD release published by Entr'acte (*Secede*, 2009). Seems a very suitable team-up, so can you tell us a little about this?

CM: Yes. It started out on the internet as a proposed exchange of files with Austrian sound artist Helmut Schäfer. It originally only got to the very early planning stages with him, just some initial improvised computer tracks that I recorded and sent over to him. He died not long after we started to discuss the project, and I initially decided to shelve the work I had done. He doesn't appear on the tracks, and I decided, a few months down the line, to complete the recordings solo by way of a dedication to him.

There's no doubt that the album would be very different as a collaboration, but I'm happy with the way it came out. I played it to Allon at Entr'acte, and he offered to put it out as a CD. There was talk of it being on vinyl at one point, but I'm glad we didn't do that, in hindsight. It seems to work nicely as a completely digital piece. It felt important that these recordings were executed and delivered professionally and to a high standard, hence the mastering work. Allon's got a great eye for sleeve design, so I'm happy that Entr'acte took the release, as it looks extremely striking. It comes in a screen-printed, vacuum-packed foil sleeve. It would have seemed less than appropriate, given the dedication to Schäfer, to bang it out quickly on a CDr with photocopied artwork, for example. Don't get me wrong; some releases exist nicely in that way, as quickly-released documents of a time or an event, but others need to be worked on a little more.

ALAP: Can you see a time when you will no longer record and release work as Cheapmachines? Is it a project with a limited life-span?

CM: Not at the moment. Part of the reason for keeping the output diverse is so that I am free to change things as I see fit. I never wanted to get into the situation where I have multiple aliases for different styles of recordings for the listener's benefit. That smacks too much of creating my own little meaningless pigeon- holes. I'd rather people just took a chance and maybe ended up hearing something that they hadn't come across before. I may well appear under my real name from time to time when it isn't, strictly speaking, or doesn't feel like a Cheapmachines release; i.e a collaboration where I play on someone else's record or where it's a group effort. If it ever feels like I'm repeating myself, that's when I'll stop what I'm doing.

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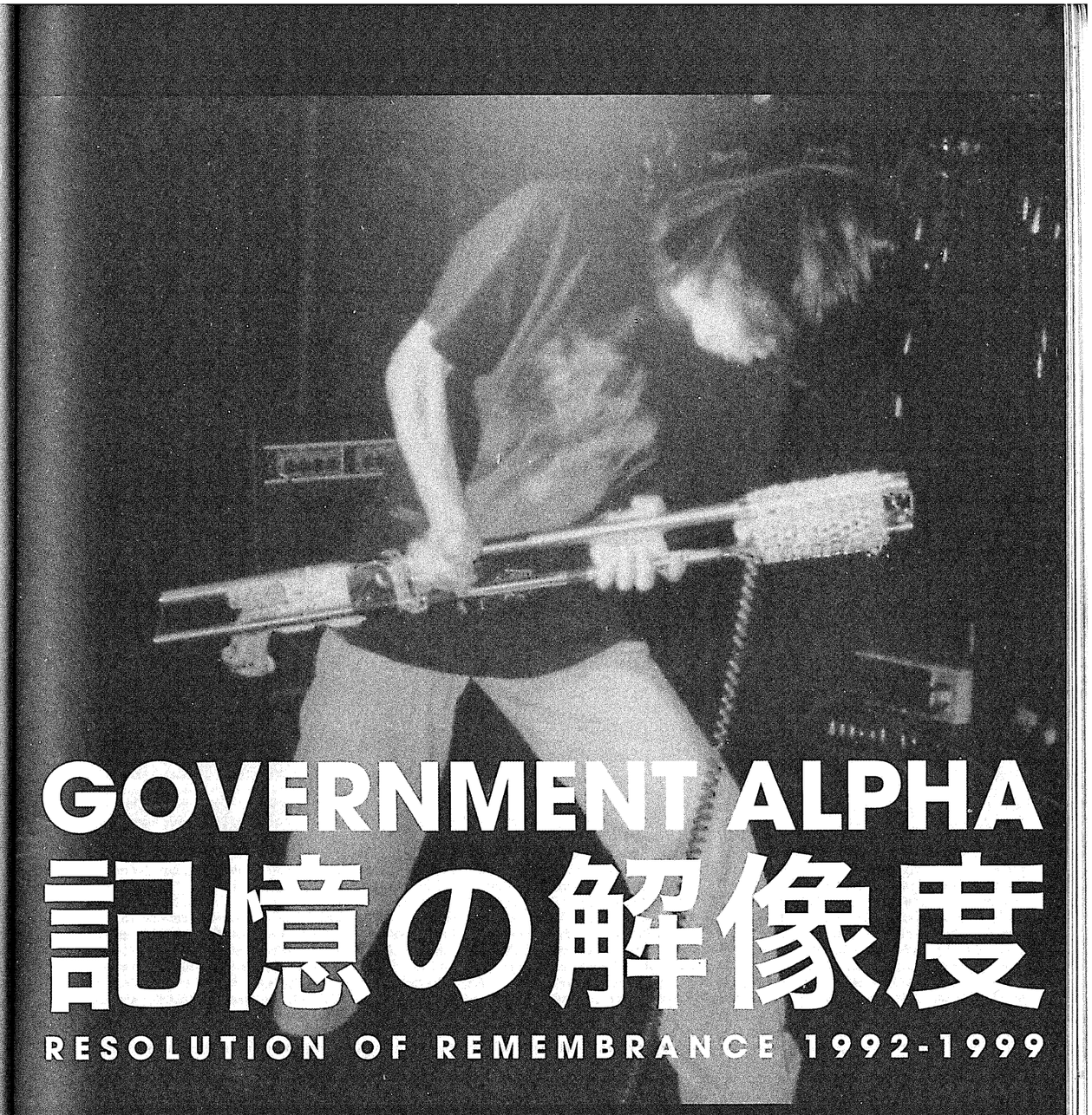

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Pica Disk

IDES RECORDINGS

NICOLE CHAMBERS INTERVIEWED
BY CHRIS SIENKO

Nicole Chambers conceives, plans, and executes her IDES label with all the precision of a professional chess player (or, to quote Throbbing Gristle, it is "as well thought out as a government coup"). No aspect of the label, from design to materials to contributors, can be over-thought, or is free from analysis or critique.

As a result, IDES has a bullet-proof sense of self. The artwork is conceptually unified, but with plenty of variance from release to release (and not homogenous like PURE or Ground Fault), from Crib Death's violent pen scribbles to Secret Abuse's Callow God-derived parallel-lines-as-frames borders. The unified gray cardstock used for every cover is tactile and feels like the less hateful cousin of the similarly design-unified Since 1972 label (currently on sad, ponderous hiatus).

Even IDES' artistic statements are mysteriously uniform. Look at the titles — while it could hardly have been premeditated, there's something eerie about the way nearly every title falls on either side of a dividing line. There is the axis of humanity, alone vs. group (*Oneism*, *Deny 1*, *Kingdom*, *Reciprocity*) and the axis of sex: love vs. loathe (*Sexuality is a Curse*, *Master I Have Desire*, *Slit Ritual*, *Psychosexual*). Also, every tape on the label is either by a solo project or collaborations between two people who would not otherwise work together; ones and twos.

Leaving such conspiracy-minded considerations aside for a minute, Chambers has a real knack for coaxing the best material from her participants, and many of the works reviewed herein feel like definitive statements. More refreshing still is the longevity of the releases; IDES tapes stay in print for a long time, so there's no worries about being away from your computer for 24 hours after new releases are announced. At the same time, this is no Sound of Pig, and as Ms. Chambers' interview answers indicates, any of these could get deleted sometime in the future. In the interest of stopping the clock, here are ten choice tapes from the stable.

Panicsville throws emotion roughly up against the wall with his *Psychosexual* tape, rescuing Side One ('Anatomy of a Psychodrama') from an edition of 25 out-of-print tour-only CDr. The track doesn't hit me on a gut level, though; its multiple layers of synth abuse work academically, but not viscerally, and academically speaking, they could stand to attend a little summer school. Side Two, on the other hand, is probably the best Panicsville track I've ever heard. Over an intentionally randomized 12-tone synth pattern, 'Spider Mums' allows itself to wind down and down entropically until we arrive in a most arid territory, with only the occasional dot of sound echoing into cavernous space, the resultant clouds of sound resembling far-off footsteps, while percussive jabs and synth blarps jump out at you from open doorways along a Kubrickian long hallway. A low hum of florescent light is omnipresent. It's interesting that Ortmann's take on what sounds to these ears like the hospital/nightmare scenario manages to sound so different from other clinicians like Steel Hook Prosthesis or N. His is a hospital more metallic and futuristic, as opposed to SHP's clammy iron-lung contamination or N.'s ashen terminal ward. If these are improvised live, as they claim to be, they are quite strong performances. Artwork is swaddled in Andy's brainy, lumpy, teethy, tendril-y, artwork. A good variant on the 'usual' Panicsville sound.

Walter Carson (nee Daryl Cook) is a perpetually under-the-radar project from Lexington, best known for his LP on Gods of Tundra (*Recalcitrants*, 2007). Unlike many working today who take one approach and endlessly refine/repeat/beat it to death, Cook treats each new recording as a true experiment. As such, his recordings vary wildly in style, tone, and approach and contain the thrill of new discovery. On this tape, titled *Three Ellipticals*, the closest comparison might be late, lamented California project Fin, particularly the recently-unearthed Fin material memorialized on a 3-inch CDr on P-Tapes. Each track contains unrelated data in each ear — high-fret guitar raking in one channel, tweeting keyboard in the other, high and low contrasts completely separate and unrelated, like Cage's concept of Indeterminacy but with riffing. Each side is punctuated by little flits of silence, like he's breaking up the signal with a noise-gate, or a tremolo. Atmospherically speaking, there's a nervous, *Conet Project* quality to it all. The noise-gate closes more and more often as the side goes on, allowing only small fragments of scree to scrabble through the iris. Side Two trades guitar tones for more synth tones, and contains more 'playing.' Side One gets the big nod for its relative lack of 'playing.'

IDES figurehead Nicole Chambers spares no expense to make her *Reciprocity* tape sound like the crud at the bottom of an unempied trashcan. Low-fi, crud-fi, muck-fi, dirt-fi, guilt-fi, undersea-fi, filth-fi, gloop-fi, bilge-fi, sty-fi, skunk-fi, N.-fi. A motionless, eventless, cadence-less evocation of near-isolation. Just about everyone on this label (save, perhaps, Climax Denial and Secret Abuse) could learn a thing or two about setting a mood and not fiddling with it, and Chambers is the person most qualified to give the lecture. A good piece of micro-fiction will expand in your memory, living in a place much larger than described in its original three paragraphs/30 minutes. Minimal paintings allow you to abandon analysis and revel in every brush stroke. Think of Cage's dictum about people's reaction to quiet music: "Did you hear that?" Like a Silvum record that has been tarred, feathered, and sent out into the wilderness, *Reciprocity* lives in stasis; not the stasis of Silvum's 'silent snow falling on silent snow,' but the stasis of a curdled, soupy marsh, endlessly bubbling with menace, but containing no living things. (She now performs simply under the name Chambers.)

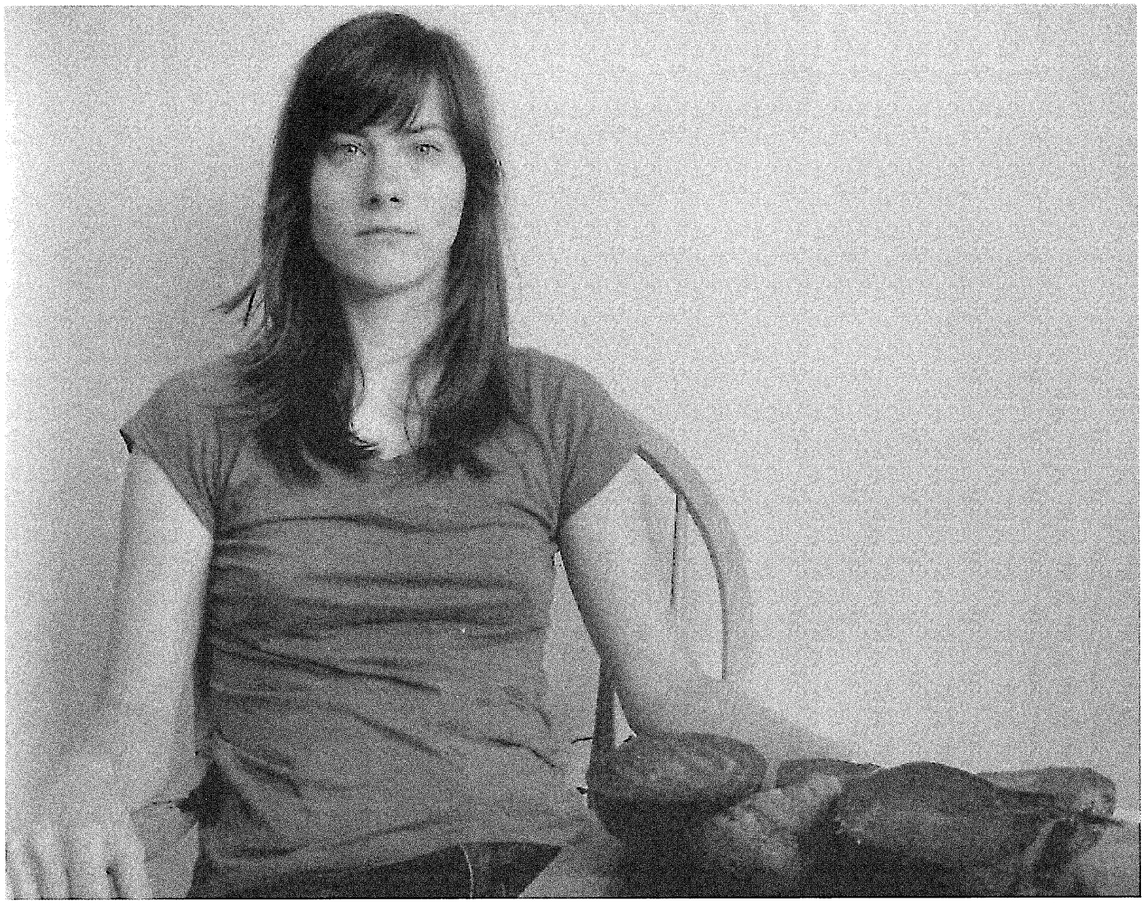
Sixes' *Slit Ritual* is a squishy, steaming, scraping set of ginch-tones, like *Cartridge Music* scored for dirty axe-wounds. Mushy noises turn into the braying of ghasts, as loops start to sound like they are running backwards and forwards simultaneously. Sounds like a congress of imps, eating lesser demons while braying for their turn at the podium. Bring your Mutant Repellant.

Clocking in at a healthy 60 minutes, Caves' *Kingdom* (another release by a Lexingtonian, Ben Allen) breaks its duration into six 'songs,' making it feel like an old-time double album, or pre-noise *Cassette Mythos*-era tape release. Nearly all tracks have guitar as their primary tool, with track two's 'Chair' bringing to mind the perfection of Donald Miller's *A Little Treatise On Morals* cassette — six-string refuse with tinfoil gilding. Unfortunately, many pieces go astray by an unfortunate tendency toward 'real' guitar playing, inducing momentum where none is needed and suggesting that the architect of these structures already grows tired of his own creations. Most tracks do not fall flat, though — many are lovely, like 'My Kingdom,' which sounds exactly like the Theater of Eternal Music, if you replace 'Music' with 'Vague Frustration'; or 'Vesper Smoke,' which treads the ground of Loren Mazzacane, but without all the tweedle-tweedle; and 'Reaping,' an industrial pounder almost worthy of the glorious track 'Cock E.S.P.' by Hanatarashi. No one track rules or sucks all the way through, though — they almost all start out great, but a full half of them are blown by overstaying their welcome. Like the Skaters, I wish it were possible to tell Caves not to play so much. It's perfectly acceptable to build beautiful structures and then walk serenely through them. It's not necessary to tap dance in every room.

Kites' *Deny 1* is hobbyist circuit-bending and ungodly sci-fi brain scramble that should sweep the lesser Solid Eye works clean off the table. Test-tones and vintage Telstar communications, re-enactments of Melon Expander's wettest dreams. The deep tones collapse into over-saturation, and the supposed 'folk side' of Chris Forgues heard on the 'major' releases is not found here. What does it all mean for IDES? Kites brings a home-built, assured, and fabricated classiness/modernity to the feast. Oscillator, space-burn, machine howl, sweltering electricity, megaphones as public address systems, electricity swarms, fillets of melodicism spot-varnished onto tin roofs for maximum buzz and rattle. Moods shift effortlessly from claustrophobic to ecstatic, with no altering of materials — everything is controlled, and it moves and progresses through numerous territories, including a masterfully uneasy section involving deep pulses and repeated sound of water pouring. Some noise is for punishing, some exists for dissection of detail, some is for motion, and some is for entropy. Like Nurse With Wound, Brume, Lionel Marchetti and others, Kites' noise is for travel (though lacking their razor-sharp incisions), and it tickles your mind with fragmented thought, acting every bit like the carnival ringleader suggested on the strange, antique cover drawing, not only summoning and taming the horrific slug-man, but also making him dance for your nickels.

Raglani's *Oneism* is nothing less than harmonically dense, rich, ambient music. Like other IDES releases, this too has lots of non-noise 'playing' on it (including a pedal steel guitar that could bring to mind the KLF's *Chill Out* album if you're approaching your 30s). Difference is that this makes no pretense about its musicality; actually, the noise exists mostly as the afterthought. There is no reaching for effects here, and this is one of the most assured Raglani pieces I've heard to this point. It begins in wispy, billowing synth mode, ridden with anxiety, but never dread. At times, it resembles the somnambulant music of a nature documentary, but that's no slur — SOMEBODY has to sing those pupae out of their cocoons. There's even some IDM-style beats in places, and some pretty, chord-heavy piano makes it sound like we've crossed back over into the Caves tape. It's an exquisite stasis, like the dining room at the end of *2001*, but evoked only with sound. The tape ends with the flying saucers annihilating the holy bejeezus out of our planet. A beautiful way to say goodbye to the universe as we know it.

Jeff Witscher, best known for his harsh noise project Impregnable, here works in more compositional modes as Secret Abuse. My first impression



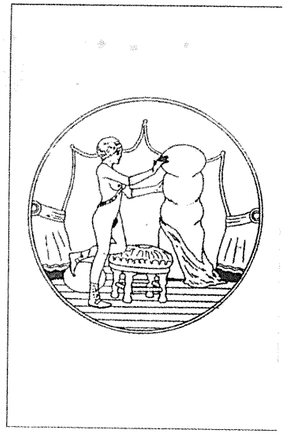
Nicole Chambers. Chicago 2009

of this project caused me to churlishly refer to it as 'Jeff Witscher's Prurient,' but subsequent listens to *Master I Have Desire* indicate other intentions. For one, there's a lot less tension and a lot more release in Witscher's approach...crumbling harsh noise and claustrophobic screams are erased by swells of genuinely beautiful, majestic electronics, and trauma frequently gives way to themes of nostalgia, sounding the way old photographs look. Witscher's vocals travel to us through a layer of waterfall and two dolorous music boxes, and his sound construction finesses layers that alternate between pretty and harsh, one almost succumbing to the other and vice-versa, back and forth, catch and release, with smooth transitions that suggest the technical mastery of a late-night radio DJ, or a director of short films. I now begin to understand the rabid devotion of Secret Abuse fans, though too late for me as, sadly, many of the project's best works only appeared on low-edition cassette tapes, and are now long gone.

Perhaps Chambers' biggest coup for the label so far is the release of Mammal's *Distant Days*, a *The Politics of Time*-styled c60 of odds, sods, demos and lives from pre-Mammalian existence to the not-so-distant future. From the modern and bass-driven (dig the slippery, vocal-heavy cover of Tyrannosaurus Rex's 'Wind Cheetah') all the way back to the earliest neon pogo-sticks of yore (such as 'Alan Trammel,' a comp track from the Seagull label double tape *Sounds for Collector Scum*, a compilation that many ordered but few received), there are through-lines running through every track, primarily Gary's tone throughout. From all the years of working the internal feedback and the mysterious suitcase setup brought on stage, up to the modern bass/drum machine/electronics setup, Mammal has always had a unique tone to everything, a bone-hard column of distortion with very little grit and a lot of sheen. Also, it's worth noting that many demo versions of Lonesome Drifter songs are different in that they're more pared down in the final versions, even though Gary is a quite capable soloist. Then there's the great riffs: 'Shining Sky (Version)' is so minimal, it's boggling how compelling its two-note melody is, while a live version of *Lonesome Drifter*'s 'Cremation' brings such a funereal atmosphere, you can almost hear the exact moment when the body's last vestiges of hope are unceremoniously incinerated and sent into the sky as a final burnt offering to hopelessness. And lend an ear to the singer-with-bass ballad 'Tentacle,' all the way back from 1997, proving that tracks like 'Fatherland' are not so much new as they are re-imagined with an evolved sound. It's an improvement, too — the Gary Beauvais of 1997 sounds a lot more flippant, his lyrics more self-consciously surreal, while the tortured soul that wrote 'Drifter in the City' sounds like he's packed 30 years of living into a lean 10.

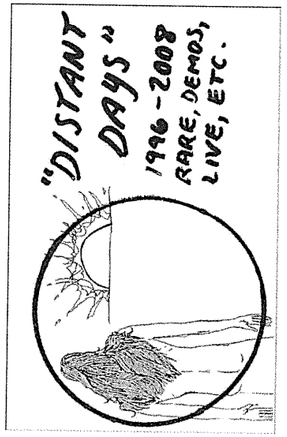
Surprisingly, the thesis of this tape is not concerned with demonstrating the intense metamorphosis from beat-heavy dance manipulator to desert-baked shaman, but that all the elements that make up the modern Mammal have been there from the beginning, if only we had eyes to look (though surely there could be 3-7 more comp tapes worth of material from the archives that would imply otherwise). Most importantly, the tape shouldn't be seen as some sort of 'for obsessives only' collection of scraps and dog-ends whose only purpose is to provide clues or riddles for continuity freaks. *Distant Days* ranks as one of the 2 or 3 best Mammal tapes of all time, and is recommended to casual listeners and grizzled '02 freaks alike.

The under-recorded SIXES/Gerritt matchup Deathroes finds a new lair in IDES, releasing their *An Infinite Blaze* tape seemingly from the top of Minas Tirith. After a short invocation, the air is suddenly choked with leagues of leather-winged demons engaging in horrific, screaming assaults on terrified villagers and each other, while groundswells of lava



Kites 'Deny 1'

Secret Abuse 'Master I Have Desire - Young Pig Vol. 2'



Mammal 'Distant Days'

and fire burst up through fissures in the ground. Maybe it's just the band name, the medieval typography on the cover, or the duo's pedigree as purveyors of blackened noise (Sixes: *Cursed Beast*, *Hexane*, and *Gallows*) and power (Gerritt: *Space-Level Blaze* and *Proof of Powers*), but the imagistic nature of the noise here very strongly resembles a detail in a Breughel painting. The first side ends with a reverberating room tone, like a great, featureless prison cell where the righteous are left to wander. Side Two's 'Culled by Crucible' is thicker and denser, with full, strong, wind-tunnel sonorities predominating. There are occasional ringing feedback tones and gurgling water sounds hiding in the back, but overall, this side is neither as evocative or varied as side one, though no moment of the side really wavers in quality, either. A beastly blast furnace of a tape from beginning to end, *An Infinite Blaze* sounds like Gerritt and Sixes grabbing their batons and conducting the battle of Armageddon.

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AS LOUD AS POSSIBLE: **What, if anything, is the connecting tissue that links all the artists on IDES Recordings? Do all of these projects have a certain something that you enjoy, or is there a sense that you want to represent artists that are otherwise under-represented? Have any releases been cherry-picked specifically to 'fill a niche' in your label, or in general?**

NICOLE CHAMBERS, IDES: **So far the constant but somewhat unintentional theme has been one-person projects and collaborations from the U.S. It's a central interest of mine, but not something I intend to be restrictive about (though that scope does allow for so many possibilities). Currently, the label is just a tape series which is my attempt to document artists I value personally as creators and friends working within a similar time period as myself. Generally, they are people whose work I have enjoyed over the course of years and/or feel an immediate connection to. For me, it's about choosing projects I want to remember years from now and those that relate to my life on some level.**

ALAP: **Do you do all your own layout designs, or do the musicians on each tape contribute artwork/ideas/designs as well?**

NC: **All artwork and layouts are collaborative in some way. I have received everything from a ripped Xeroxed image from a book to complete designs that fit within my template. It depends on the artist...some people are very specific, others are not. I enjoy both instances, seeing what people come up with, what they feel is important to the visuals of a release, how other people put things together, or, if they don't, arranging images and text in ways I feel might work best. Regardless, communication is a key factor in creating release artwork and I work with everyone to the extent they would like to be involved.**

ALAP: **I've heard rumors that all of your releases are unlimited runs, or that there is a limited 'first edition' version which is then replaced by an unlimited edition second version of the tape. But then, I've also heard from you that some of these tapes may eventually be deleted! Is this a way to keep collectors on their toes, or has your opinion on some of these releases changed over time?**

NC: **This is a very important aspect about the tape series that most people don't know about or understand. I never have a predetermined number of tapes I'm going to make, or various editions. Occasionally, changes are made to artwork, but no version is more special than another. For now, my aim is to keep most releases in print indefinitely, but over time this will become increasingly difficult and some titles will eventually be unavailable. This will probably be based on how many copies have already sold, how long the tape has been available, or if an artist requests it. The point is for these releases to be heard...by more than 30, or 100 people. Overall, I think the limited-edition tape world is rather disappointing and tiresome, and I want to put out things people will listen to repeatedly over time. I don't care about collectors at all, and once certain titles become 'unavailable' I can imagine myself making a copy here or there if someone expresses genuine interest in hearing something. On the other hand, there will eventually be limited edition releases on the label that include other formats or packaging that is more difficult to restock, or requires outside help/manufacturing.**

ALAP: **Labels always seem to carry with them a personality of their owner, and yours, in some ways, reminds me of the great SPITE label, because it seems like both of you have a knack for requesting (and receiving) consistently better-than-average releases from the people you work with. Do you give them specific parameters or boundaries to work with, or special instructions? Do people simply send you masters unsolicited? Have any of the current releases made it in that way?**

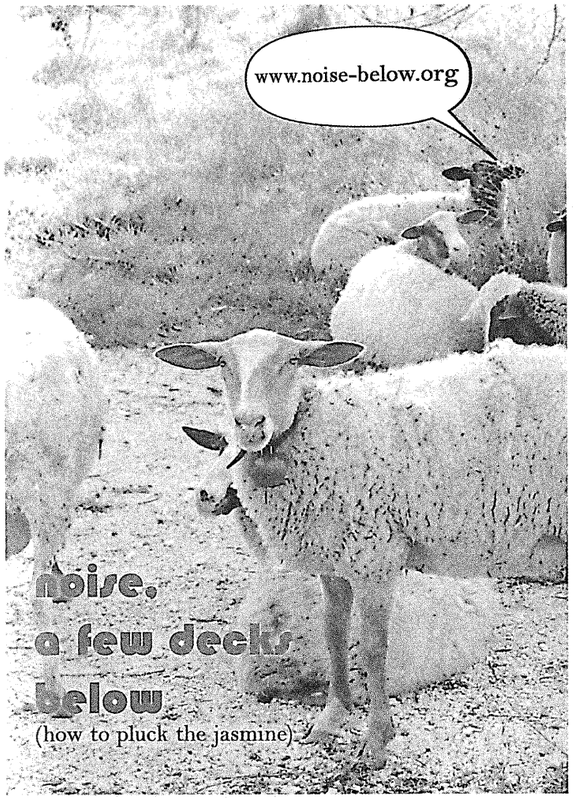
NC: **Sometimes, I mention elements I really like about a project, in hopes that those things will be emphasized or somehow apparent on the release I'm putting out. In other instances, I have suggested tape lengths to encourage people who often do short releases to try and see what happens when they set out to do something longer, etc. Aside from that, I really leave it up to the artist to do as they feel, and that mystery and hearing things for the first time is one of the most exciting aspects of running a label. I can't imagine ever accepting an unsolicited master unless it was from someone who knows I'm a huge fan and feels they have a recording that would be perfectly suited for IDES. In terms of receiving material, I think the nature of the label/keeping things in print, asking people who have met and know me on some level, and not just sending a Myspace message that says 'dude wanna do a tape' are some small but important things that help ensure receiving quality material.**

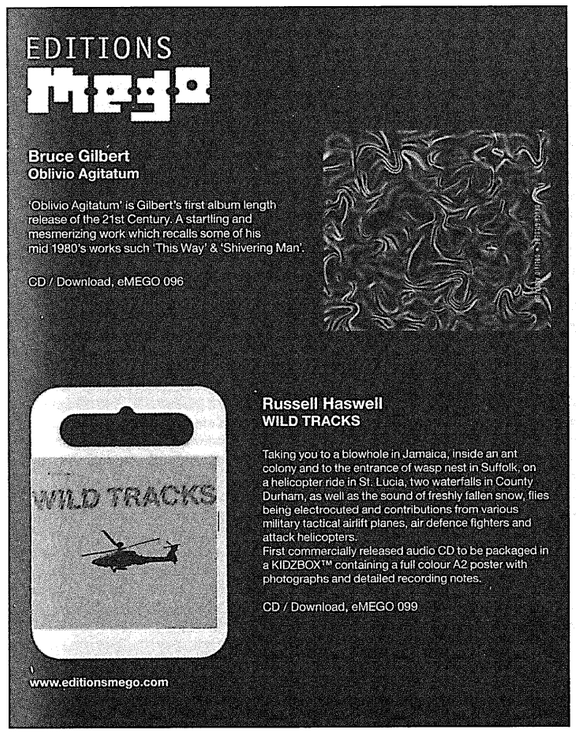
ALAP: **What are you looking for in a release? I get the sense from you that you aren't afraid to ask for a second master if the initial submitted release isn't up to snuff.**

NC: **I am most excited when I receive a master that captures what I feel is the true essence of a project. On the other hand, I also really enjoy complete surprises, or releases that explore an alternate direction, concept, or sound for an artist. It's great to hear or sense another piece of the puzzle falling into place regarding the overall vision or accidental progression of a project I have interest in, and thus far I have been extremely pleased. I usually think about asking someone to do a release for a very long time, and naturally only ask people I trust creatively to give me something exceptional.**

ALAP: **Have you given any thought to assembling a compilation? Your label line-up spans across so many 'lines' of experimental interest, it seems like you could make a really unique, maybe even legendary comp from the IDES stable of artists.**

NC: **Yes, I've had a few different ideas but none are just right, and now is not the right time. I really prefer the one-on-one experiences of listening to a release devoted to one project, as well as collaborations and split releases, so I will continue to focus on those kinds of things for now.**

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APRAXIA RECORDS

PATRICK BARBER INTERVIEWED
BY STEVE UNDERWOOD
INTRODUCTION BY CHRIS SIENKO

There's been a debate brewing recently about whether 'special packaging' for noise releases is getting better or worse. One side claims we're living in a new golden age, where every fifth release comes in some sort of faux-leather/hand-painted/book-bound presentation case for prominent display in your milk crate/plywood-and-cinderblock/IKEA shelf of choice. The other faction seems to pine for the days when there was a perpetual run on chicken wire, balsa wood boxes, and velvet bags at the local craft supply store.

This is an oversimplification, of course, but it gets to the core of what's being argued about, which I think requires clarification of the term 'special packaging,' and how the term has changed over the years. Even taking into the account that there's just a lot MORE noise out there now than there was 10 years ago and more shapes and packages to put it in, it's also safe to say that there's a mild upswing in the general quality of packages. Scanning the piles of tapes and discs on the floor, you see a lot more full-color (laser printed, but still), more professionally silkscreened covers, more gold-foil embossing, and less Xerox j-cards and stencils. That's as much a loosening of the price of materials as anything — It's a lot easier to 'order out,' to get a nicer paper to print on, have a custom die-cut fold-out insert made for your CD, or find some hitherto-undiscovered type of soft vinyl snapcase for your multi-cassette opus. So yes, there's an overall swing upward.

But the people in camp two tend to think of 'special packaging' more in terms of an art object, something inseparably bound to the sonics. The early American Tapes 'object' style packages created a perfect symbiosis between their basement-fi improvisations and the eruptions of epoxy, HO-scale railroad ties, branches, popsicle sticks, recycled 45s, and the gallons of spray lacquer that encased them. Has any current project gone past :zoviet*france: in their mating of album coverings with the sounds inside (*Norsch*'s tinfoil; *Gris*'s roofing shingle; *Eostre*'s almost-impossible-not-to-damage tissue paper) without obviously paying homage? Sure, noise tends to look more 'legit' on the whole than it did 15 years ago, but who is creating multi-layered objects like tac's *Situations and Circumstances*, its layers of painted leather, dried leaves, seed pods, fencing material, and other organic/inorganic materials tied and fastened so densely that you can almost hear the sounds inside without even taking the disc out? Who lately has bothered to create a package as painful and brilliant as Skin Crime's *King of the Deathmatch*, wrapped head to toe in black electrical tape, its hide entirely covered in sharp tacks, an object that not only references the tape's extreme wrestling theme, but could probably cause serious damage if used on an opponent in a fight. A few carry the torch, such as Hate State's niftily-knitted contraptions (the Justice Yeldham tape with the plexiglass 'window' is particularly brill), and Cipher Productions' occasionally unhygienic extended editions (do not put your fingers in your eyes after handling the pile of wood, plastic sheeting, and, for lack of better definition, SLUDGE that surrounds Altar of Flies' *Black Tunnels*). However, the tendency as a whole is sliding away from Unabomber and toward Craft Night.

It's maybe no surprise that Mark Schomburg (aka Abo, of the Seattle-based collective Yeast Culture) has recently resurfaced, revving up his Incubator label to once again release the contagion, turning out specially packaged records with a density of not just paint or caliper, but ideas. Look at your copy of *IYS* again, or the 'Circusirus' triple 7-inch set (or, if you came to the game more recently, the newly-issued Hands To 2LP *Flatline* and the Small Cruel Party *All Early Parts* tape) and be reminded of how much harder it is to find your voice in your packaging method than it is to spring extra 10 cents a sheet for the textured paper at the copy shop.

Apraxia was one of those cassette labels that successfully managed to constantly release high quality works in a variety of packages that complimented both the material and the artists' vision. The label was ran by Patrick Barber from his home in Seattle and focused not only on his own work under the alias of Lab Rat and his involvement with both Blowhole and Kalberer Hotel Supply, but was happy to act as a conduit for his friends, such as one-time KHS sidekick Key Ransone's Small Cruel Party and Jeph Jerman's Hands To project. He also took in the likes of The Haters, Prick Decay (an early vent for Blood Stereo's Dylan Nyoukis), Kapotte Muziek, and the late MSBR. Today, Barber concentrates fully on his work as a graphic designer.

AS LOUD AS POSSIBLE: **At what point did you decide to set up the Apraxia Music Research label, and what was the original motivation?**

PATRICK BARBER, APRAXIA MUSIC RESEARCH: **I started Apraxia as a way to release my own music on cassette. It was 1988, I believe. I was working for a small label and mail-order distribution company that I had helped found called Mosh Pit Records, in Colorado. We had started Mosh Pit as a way to distribute my first record, which was with a hardcore punk band called Expatriate. The distribution company soon began to distribute all kinds of music.**

Meanwhile, Expatriate broke up and I started to make some solo music, mostly consisting of disintegrating field recordings layered with spoken bits — what would now be called Sound Art. I called this project Lab Rat. My first tape was released by my friend Jeph Jerman on his Big Body Parts cassette label (a label which was distributed by Mosh Pit). As I began to make more music and learn more about the cassette culture that Jeph was a part of, I decided to create my own cassette label.

ALAP: **Most of the releases seem to have a close connection to you, inasmuch as you're either playing on the recording or the artist is a good friend of yours. Was this an intentional label 'policy'? This applies to the compilations as much as the other releases.**

PB: **As I just mentioned, it wasn't so much a policy but, more simply, a reality. Especially at the beginning, most of the Apraxia releases were either my solo project, a friend's solo project, or a band I was playing in. One early release, Misery Guts, was from a fellow in England whom I'd known as a pen-pal through the international hardcore scene, and he'd also expanded his interest in punk rock to include dissonant or deconstructed sound. Other releases were from side projects of people I'd known from the Colorado music scene; for example, the release by The Miracle, which was an improvisational collective of which my musical colleague Little Fyodor was a part.**

Then as the label grew and developed, so did my involvement with the music community; for example, I knew Key Ransone of Small Cruel Party when I moved to Seattle in 1991, and we started the band Kalberer Hotel Supply together. Of course I released KHS tapes on Apraxia, and I released a Small Cruel Party cassette also.

At some point, though it seems laughable to even say it, Apraxia became nearly legitimate, and I was able to approach artists whose work I knew and ask them to create a recording to release on Apraxia. Examples of this type of release include the John Hudak pieces, the Lhasa Cement Plant cassette (a Borbetomagus side-project), the Kapotte Muziek cassette, and the MSBR one. Also, at some point the line between personal acquaintance and, um, non-personal acquaintance began to be blurred somewhat. As you probably know, the noisy corner of the music world that Apraxia occupied in the early '90s was a small place, and it was easy to connect with people through the mail, and later through email. As a result, many of the releases I put out were artists whose work I knew of through a friend who knew the artist, or something like that.

ALAP: **Some of the cassettes, such as MSBR's *Supplement* and Small Cruel Party's *Three Simple Eyes of the Insect Ancestor*, came in incredibly detailed handcrafted packages. Why did you feel such detail and attention was required?**

PB: **Often, the idea for an elaborate package came from the artist. In the two examples you gave, the packages were both conceived and executed by the artists. I think part of it was that the cassette medium itself was, by definition, so mundane. The other two recording standards, LP and CD, were 'permanent' and also more easily indexable and searchable. Meanwhile, cassettes could still be recorded over! The mainstream music industry's cassettes were simply copies of pre-existing LPs, not meant to stand on their own. But these handmade cassettes certainly were their own representatives, and I think that in most cases, when a cassette label put extra effort into the package, part of the impetus was to try and create a release that would be taken seriously as music, and as a musical release, even though it was 'only' a cassette.**

Another factor was, perhaps, the cost, or lack thereof. Cassettes were cheap and making standard covers and cases for them was also cheap. But sometimes the work that went into producing a release was quite extensive. A more elaborate package made it reasonable to charge more for the end product, which made it possible to consider putting a lot of work and/or research into a release. There were also certain projects that grew complex of their own accord. Sometimes it seemed like the project had been in the mill for so long that an elaborate package was simply the appropriate thing to commemorate such a laborious enterprise.

I had mixed feelings about the elaborate packaging. Often I would see elaborately-packaged cassettes or records and think that the packaging would seem to outdo the actual music. I tried to make the package and the music work as a whole piece, and I was probably not always successful, but I certainly got carried away in the fun and excitement of putting together a fancy package.

An example of some packages that I thought worked particularly well as a whole are:

Blowhole. Seattle. 1996

The Haters, Silent Shovels Nowhere Now: **It was a cassette of amplified sounds of disintegration. I created a package that used bits of broken audio equipment inside an oversized tape box.**

Hands To, HTAG: **Jeph suggested that we treat this tape as if it were an artifact that was found by an archaeologist. Our first plan was to release it as a standard cassette, with liner notes written as if from an archaeological research project. But then we decided to make the tape itself the artifact. So I made up a bunk runic alphabet to write the track listing in, and I packaged each tape with its track listing in a mummified little box. For many of the first round of copies, I actually buried the packages in the ground in my back garden, and then dug them up when it came time to fill the orders.**

Some examples of packages that I really like a lot, but that I must admit went a bit over the top are:

Acousticide, a compilation: **This all-acoustic collection was packaged in handmade wooden boxes, each covered with a screen-printed cloth. Instead of a track listing or booklet, each track was listed on an individual card with the artist's name, track name, and contact information. The most ridiculous instance of this was a tape attached to a large six-by-four foot frame of some kind that I had found in an alley. I screen-printed the art directly onto the wood of the frame, housed the tracklisting cards in a cassette box which was then glued to the frame, and then suspended the cassettes from wires strung taut to each corner of the frame. A local shop took the piece on consignment on the condition that I would take it back if it didn't sell within a month (the shop was extremely small, it was the first incarnation of OM records, a little room in the back of a bookstore). Fortunately, it sold!**

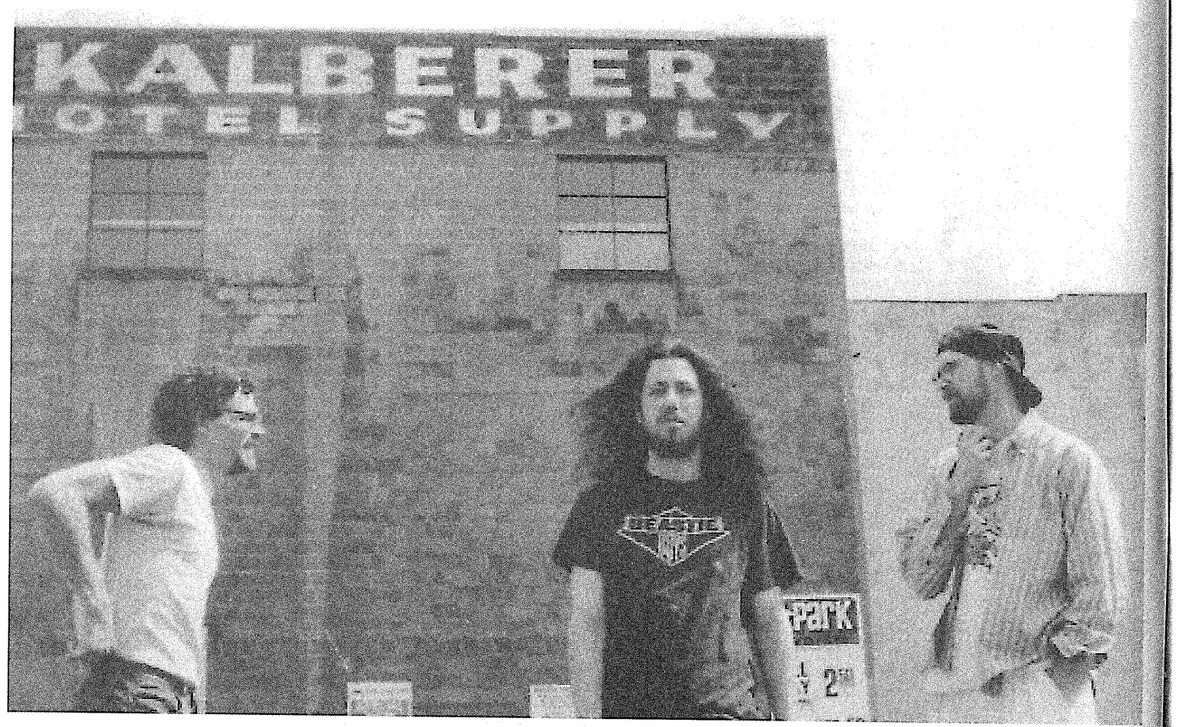
John Hudak, Dream Kit: **This package was the result of a very long correspondence and exchange with the artist. I have to say, I do think that the package itself related very nicely to the content of the music, but even so, it was a bit over the top! We assembled a stack of maps printed on clear plastic and small hand-sewn drawstring bags and placed them, with the cassette, onto a 5-inch reel tape box. Inside each little bag was the content of one owl pellet. Owl pellets are dried-up bits of the regurgitated contents of an owl's stomach. The pellets can be found on the forest floor and, when disassembled, are revealed to contain the bones of voles and other small rodents that the owl eats whole and then digests, regurgitating the indigestible bits. A fellow in northern Washington State ran a business selling these pellets to schools for science classes, so we obtained a number of them and I took each one apart and placed its contents within these little drawstring bags with, I think, a bit of incense. Even now when I open a copy of *Dream Kit*, I get a very strong sense memory of doing that work. So for me the release is certainly all of a piece, but I can't claim to know what the experience was like for the average listener!**

ALAP: **Your works with Blowhole are fairly well known, but can you tell us a little about the ideas behind both Lab Rat and Kalberer Hotel Supply?**

PB: **Lab Rat was my solo project. At first I was just trying to make noise, mostly by crudely processing found sounds. In the mid-'90s, I began using Lab Rat to explore a few different ideas, such as the 'Experiental Transference Bisection' [released as a split tape with Speculum Fight], a recording of a bicycle ride superimposed over the ambient sounds of the same bicycle, amplified and processed. I also became interested in multiply-layered feedback, which is to say, I would get a string of guitars and amps together and feed them back into one another. The overtones and different reactions the amplifiers would have, according to the space they were in, was fascinating to me and an extension of my interests in improvised music and heavy metal/grindcore. I continued to explore both avenues, found sound and live performances, under the name Lab Rat.**

Kalberer Hotel Supply was born out of a desire I had to make music with Key soon after I moved to Seattle. My roommate and old friend Ben Trissel wanted to join in, so we became a trio. KHS was a live consort, my concept was that we would make music that sounded like Musique Concrete or Sound Art, but do so in a live setting. We did not always succeed in this effort, but we did make some interesting music. The personnel changed quite a bit over the years, and at one point, Blowhole was simply Kalberer Hotel Supply with a few people added. However, the KHS sound was always clearly defined. It was usually improvised, but it was distinguished from Blowhole-style improvisation in that the changes, and the player-to-player interaction, happened much more slowly and gradually.

ALAP: **There were never many non-U.S. artists that appeared on Apraxia. Any reflection on why?**



Kalberer Hotel Supply. Seattle. 1992. Photo by Daniel Barber

PB: **I can't say, really, why this was. Perhaps because the majority of the releases were projects I was involved in, or those of my colleagues, and we all lived in the States. I certainly had a lot of correspondence with artists in Europe and the United States, but it did not result in Apraxia releases.**

ALAP: **You eventually moved on to vinyl releases. Did you feel this was necessary for the label to grow, or were you just trying to move away from the limitations of the 'cassette label' tag?**

PB: **I genuinely loved playing and making records, so that was certainly a big reason. There was also a bit to it that was about the music, and the label, being taken more seriously. Cassettes had a serious limitation in that very few people would buy them or listen to them. Records, at the time, were a more generally accepted format, and of course I gradually released a few CDs, a format that was, and is, even more mainstream. One of the ironies of the cassette culture is that so much of the music was instrumental and non-linear, and so if you had a cassette with, say, 15 songs on it, you often had no idea which song was what, since you couldn't identify by the words or the chorus. So a nice thing about records and CDs was that you could follow along with the music and know which track you were listening to, and to who was playing on it, and so on.**

ALAP: **What happened to the proposed 'Composer Series' after the first release? That release seemed to coincide with you bringing the label to a finish.**

PB: **That was simply an unfortunate coincidence. I had planned the 'Composer Series' for years, but when I finally got 'round to doing it, I was losing the ability to compete with the marketplace. Previously, I'd had a successful venture due to my label's unusual output and variety of sounds, as well as the relatively low overhead of running a mostly cassette enterprise. But after I started to spend real money on CDs and LPs, I also needed to make real sales. And to do that, I had to release more things more often and spend more time promoting the releases to the radio and the press, and part of the difficulty was that suddenly, in 1997, a lot of labels were releasing cute, idiosyncratic 7-inch records, so mine just got lost in the heap. I had no interest in becoming more of a promoter, or in making lots of phone calls to get the music played or sold. Meanwhile, I had changed jobs and started working full-time as a graphic designer, which was taking up more time than ever before. Blowhole split up around the same time, and I wasn't doing much else musically. So I decided to close down the label in early '97.**

There were two more 'Composer Series' releases already in the can when I quit. They would have been good ones too. I had a lot of ideas that never made it to fruition, never mind the great lost Blowhole album, *Ukiah Haiku*, our only real studio recording, which is just sitting there, sounding good ten years later! Maybe some day, some of this material will see the light of day.

ALAP: **In retrospect, how do you view your label's work and its worth now?**

PB: **My goal was to release my own music, and, later on, music that I liked, and that I thought was worth putting out into the world. In that regard, I think I succeeded. Another valuable thing about Apraxia, and cassette labels in general, is that we operated on such a small scale that we produced very little waste or back-catalogue. This was helpful since I had very little money to spend on inventory; I would duplicate and package each cassette to order, with a few exceptions. This method served me well. I understand that large companies are using the same method to save money on warehouse space and excess inventory storage and disposal. I had the same needs in mind. When I started publishing records and CDs, I saw the disadvantage of producing large amounts of inventory; if it didn't sell, you were stuck with it. I still have a box of Blowhole CDs in the basement and a few boxes of unsold 7-inches that I have kept all these years.**

I'm not sure how to judge the worth of my tiny cassette label. I know that there were people who enjoyed the music I made available. I enjoyed playing it, and producing it, all those years. I think there is a real value to the kind of subculture that we participated in, both as a cassette label and as a musician with a tiny and dedicated audience. It creates community in a way that is important in today's society.

I can't imagine doing something like Apraxia nowadays. There are so many benefits to the way music is disseminated and produced via the internet today; the ease of hearing new music, the ability to hear music without having to produce or ship or buy a physical object. These are all good things for listeners, and good things for artists who want their music heard. But something like a small handmade label, making little listening boxes and mailing them around the world to order, doesn't seem to fit into the spectrum. Of course, I have heard that cassettes are seeing a resurgence in popularity, and that people are making limited-edition cassette releases, so perhaps I will be surprised.

Korm Plastics off the radar 2010

25th anniversary releases

The Year 25, 25 Years Of Korm Plastics
(K7 compilation, 250 copies)

Edward Ka-spel
Live In Leugen (K7, 250 copies)

Zebra
Devascapes (CD, 200 copies)

Flim
Orange (CD, 200 copies)

25 Years Of Kapotte Muziek
with Asmus Tietchens, Kapotte Muziek, Asra, Jos Smolders, DMDN, Howard Stelzer, Radboud Mens
(CD, 200 copies)

Soon

Benjamin Gwilliam & Jason Zeh
Brombron 16: *Dots* (CD)
Z'EV & KK Null
Brombron 17: *Extra Space, Extra Time* (CD)
Adam Bohman & Al Margolis
Brombron 18: *Adhesives and Grout* (CD)
Illusion Of Safety
Fin de Siècle (CD incl. bonus tracks)
New Ear
(K7)

Out now

Francisco Lopez & Richard Francis
Brombron 14: In De Blaauwe Hand (CD)
Andrea Belfi & Machinefabriek
Brombron 15: Pulses & Places
Freiband / Bass Communion
Headwind/Tailwind (3"CD)
Edward Ka-spel
Trapped In Amber (LP)
Mirko Uhlig
VIVMMI (LP)
THU20
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Example #1
Retail ready, full color CD with four page booklet and tray card packaged in a jewel case with clear tray and bar code on request. Includes five color screen or offset printing on disc face. Booklet and tray card are printed 4/K (full color outside/B&W inside).

Manufacturer	*500 Piece Price*	*1000 Piece Price*
Ground Fault	$885	$1080
Acme	$1199	$1299
Oasis	$994	$1189
Discmakers	$993	$1188
Furnace	$915	$1115
CD Centric	$1029	$1209

Example #2
Bulk full color CDs on spindle. Includes five color screen or offset printing on disc face. Films are included in the price.

Manufacturer	*500 Piece Price*	*1000 Piece Price*
Ground Fault	$375	$420
Acme	$575	$560
Oasis	$564	$639
Discmakers	$539	$589
Furnace	$560	$615
CD Centric	$529	$629

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INTERCHANGE

JOHN SMITH INTERVIEWED
BY STEVE UNDERWOOD

Being based in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne during the 80s proved to be ideal for John Smith. The amount of post-Industrial musical activity he discovered happening around him within that region gave him that push he needed to finally put together an idea he had been toying with for a while. Smith witnessed Industrial music in the UK mutating into something else, something tamer which started to bleed into the mainstream; witness bands like Psychic TV, SPK and Test Dept. starting to appear on national TV, and the likes of 23 Skidoo and 400 Blows dancing their way towards the *Funky Alternatives* series. The post-Throbbing Gristle fallout had already spread out and gone off onto wilder tangents, which were best documented by journalist David Henderson on his *The Elephant Table Album* compilation. But a more roots-level approach was required, and with his Interchange fanzine, Smith set about exploring and commenting on these uncharted territories as things snowballed under the rubric of 'Difficult Music.' Alongside the 'name' projects of the time, he was taking in the rogue elements of the scene's cassette underbelly, harsher electronic factions, synth players, genuine oddballs and isolationists, performance artists, and yes, even those who kept one eye on the dancefloor.

The music created by the likes of Zoviet France, The New Blockaders, and Metgumbnerbone, amongst others, soundtracked his transformation from listener to active participant, and even though he only went on to publish four issues of the magazine, it still stands as the most vital set of front-line dispatches issued from the UK during that invigorating period. Not only was he safely away from London's cynicism, he lacked the one-sided perspective that might result from being involved in a band, allowing him an untarnished critical approach as he attempted to cover as much of the music that was exciting him as possible.

Each issue was an information-heavy tract loaded with Smith's knowledge and informed opinion of the subject matter. A large percentage of the interviews that Interchange ran have never been republished and are unavailable on that lazy man's one-stop shop, the internet. The most famous (and obvious) contender for reproduction is the in-depth chat with Nurse With Wound's Steve Stapleton from the debut issue, which throws much light on Stapleton's work and ideas. This interview set the benchmark very high for Smith, and like those that followed, it allowed the personality of the artist to come through. (No small achievement in and of itself at a time when so many tried hard to control what information was leaked in order to maintain a sense of mystery.) It was book-ended by articles on the recordings of obscurist Martin O'Cuthbert and agitators Nocturnal Emissions, stopping in between to consider the Cause For Concern label's output, and padded out with reviews and overviews on the likes of Trax and the Recloose Organisation, making it a vital read. Only the poor reproduction quality tarnishes this A5-sized debut.

The responses transcribed from a cassette sent in by Graham Revell and his apparent indignation at some of the questions put forward to him as being "rude" may make this the most open and extensive SPK interview outside of the important Re/Search publications work. As the lead feature in the second issue, this time enlarged to the A4 size and with a slight increase in legibility, it's one of the issue's many unique catches. Running alongside it are articles on those local artists that inspired Smith in the first place, including The New Blockaders with an (unpublished since) extension of their legendary manifesto, and short interviews with Coil, pre-dating their first record album, as well as some regular networkers and fanzine fodder such as Stress and Attrition. Even the laid-back 'Euro-rock' atmospheric synth-players like Ian Boddy sit comfortably inside these pages.

It's with the third issue that Interchange really hit its stride, so much so that it had to be printed as two separate magazines. In one, Whitehouse's William Bennett shares interview space with Diamanda Galas, while artists like Toll, Uncommunity, and XX Committee fill out the rest. The bulk of the other half is taken up by an extensive chat with AMM's Keith Rowe, enhanced with elements as diverse as Le Syndicat and O Yuki Conjugate.

The fourth and final issue again had to be split into two halves, and finds The Hafler Trio and Controlled Bleeding on one side, and the contents of the vaults of the recently folded Flowmotion fanzine, a Leeds-based magazine ran by two friends of Smith's, on the other. The Flowmotion contents, of course, had all been updated in order to neatly bring that magazine to an end, and, although not known at the time, it would also be the final Interchange to see print.

Information on the works of Alvin Lucier, Conrad Schnitzler, and Ron Berry, though common currency today, was introduced throughout the issues and allowed the Interchange reader the opportunity to meet the musical forefathers they hadn't known; these historical validations are found sitting alongside, in some cases, the first in-print reviews that then-new bands such as Intrinsic Action had ever seen of their work.

The most striking aspect of the magazine is how, even with such diversity of content, everything fits alongside each other and still manages to stand alone while still retaining a balance of stylistic variation. But it acts as a sad reminder of how today, completely at odds with any notion of 'experimentation,' seemingly everyone, not just record labels, has to have their music labeled and neatly stuck into some subgenre box, totally the opposite of the open-minded agenda pushed by Interchange and its contemporaries.

Various events transpired to move Smith away from writing about music. But there is the possibility that, in the close future, reproductions of the magazine will be published. Today, John Smith is working with arts installations and busy publishing books, but still listens to the classics every now and then.

AS LOUD AS POSSIBLE: **What was your original motivation to publish Interchange? Surely there were a bunch of magazines published around the UK already that covered aspects of the DIY experimental scene. I'm thinking of publications like Vox, Tone Death, Flowmotion, and Outlet, amongst others. What did you feel you could contribute, then?**

JOHN SMITH, INTERCHANGE: **All the mags you mention were great, but great because they wrote about things that inspired them. I did the same but, obviously, my personal inspirations, whilst having some overlap with all those mags, were slightly different. I always tried to write about folks who, in my mind, deserved far more recognition than they had 'til then (though what my tiny mag would add was negligible), and to always have one 'big' interview with someone who was well-known in hopes of getting folks to take the mag and read about the others. I did have a couple of rules. One, that I only ever wrote about folks whose music I really liked (why interview folks who you don't like?), and two, that I reviewed everything I was sent, whether I liked it or not. As someone had taken time to write me and send something for free, it was rude not to!**

ALAP: **The first issue came out at the end of 1983?**

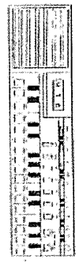
JS: **Interchange #1 was probably started about two years before the first issue was published. I began listening to electronic and experimental music whilst at school in London. Human League, Virgin Prunes, TG, Cabs, etc., and had seen a lot of fanzines for sale at gigs. Better Badges had a regular stall at gigs held at the Lyceum, but none of the mags you mentioned. I discovered Nurse With Wound after reading a review in Sounds, probably the same way most folks got to hear of them, and loved them. I thought that I should do a mag too and that they should be my main interview, and so wrote to them at the Brackenbury Road address. Steve Stapleton wrote back a lovely letter and eventually we did an interview in his tiny studio, just off Oxford Street. He was such a nice man and gave me a tape of the music playing at the time, which was Neu!, and opened up the whole 'Krautrock' world for me; I only knew of Kraftwerk and Tangerine Dream at the time. I transcribed the interview and it must have sat dormant for eighteen months or so, by which time I was far more fully immersed in the whole strange music culture, having moved up to Newcastle and met all the Newcastle scene at that time: Adventures of Twizzle (AOT), New Blockaders, Zoviet France, Metgumbnerbone, Ian Boddy, Ron Berry, etc., and the whole fanzine gang: In Control, Flowmotion, Grok, Apocalyspo A Go-Go, etc. Oddly enough, I missed out on Tone Death. I finally decided the NWW piece had to be published; all my friends were creative and I was doing virtually nothing, so I resurrected Interchange and finished it off.**

ALAP: **With the distribution network already in place, getting Interchange around wasn't too much of a problem, was it? The first issue ran to 230 copies, so what kind of expectations did you have?**

JS: **I had no real idea and was amazed that there were 230 folks who liked the stuff! The experimental world really was, and is, a small world. Nowadays, of course, it's better connected, but then it was all done by post. Probably 70% of the copies went abroad though the Netherlands with Staalplaat, Italy, the US with RRR, and Germany, in that order, and the UK sold mainly via Rough Trade. I think they took 30 copies. I seem to remember they were all sold out within six months. Everyone was uniformly kind about it even though the quality was execrable! I wanted to do another issue with better production values, and I had a whole new pile of music I liked and wanted to write about.**

ALAP: **From the beginning, you had a focus on Newcastle and its surrounding areas and the artists within that, such as Zoviet France, The New Blockaders, and Adventures of Twizzle, amongst others. Did you think most other publications had too much of a London-centric outlook?**

JS: **I didn't think about it that way at all. I just knew I really liked the music and it didn't matter where folks were from, as it was mail that linked everyone rather than location. Most of my favorite**

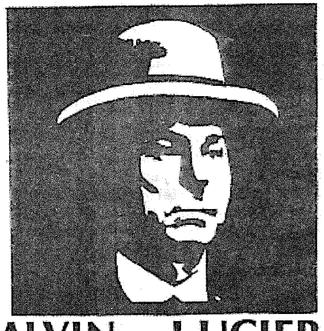


INTERCHANGE
30p
Martin O'Cuthbert
N.W.W.
INTERVIEW
T.G. UPDATE
THE FINAL ACADAMY
N.E.
ELECTRONIC/EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC

INTERCHANGE
No. 2 45p

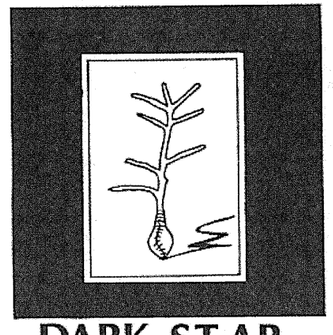
S.P.K./RON BERRY/SOVIET-FRANCE/COIL/ATTRITION

INTERCHANGE
No. 3 A
WHITEHOUSE



ALVIN LUCIER
D. GALAS
O.R.A.
50p

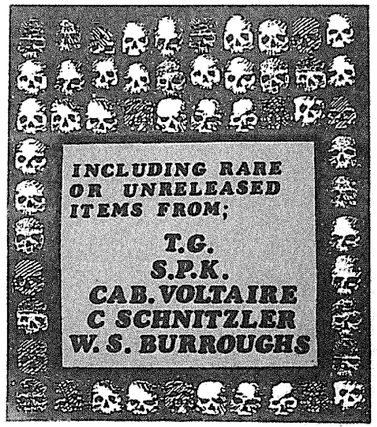
INTERCHANGE
No. 3 B
AMM



DARK STAR
PORNOSECT
BRIDES OF-CHRIST II

INTERCHANGE

No.4
FLOWMOTION RECTROSPECTIVE



Issue No.4 part A

magazines were based outside of London, such as Vox in Dublin, Flowmotion in Leeds, ND in Texas, Force Mental in Brussels, and Grok in Bristol. I think I did cover a fair amount of London-based groups in the mag, but the 'big ones,' such as PTV and Test Dept., already got publicity via the mainstream press, so there seemed little point in repeating what they had done. Had I lived in London later, I dare say there would have been more about people associated with the Recloose Organisation or Cause for Concern, whom I vaguely knew by mail, but our paths never crossed knowingly at gigs, etc. when I visited London. I dare say had I lived in Manchester, there would have been a more Manchester-orientated slant to it. I just happened to live here, so I knew a lot about Newcastle.

ALAP: **It would seem that two incidents that happened in Newcastle during those years have gone on to achieve some kind of legendary status. I'm thinking about the bust-up at the Whitehouse Morden Tower show, and the charges brought against Metgumbnerbone regarding grave-robbing. Do you want to recall those incidents?**

JS: **As I was one of the three members of the audience left after the 'riot,' and one of the grave-robbers, I can recall both very well.**

The former has become somewhat embellished over the years. Morden Tower is a very small place down a tiny dark alley on the (Newcastle) city walls, with a maximum capacity of about 40 people. All the great and the weird of Newcastle and its environs turned up for the gig, so it was at capacity and very cramped. About ten minutes into their set, William Bennett swung around and by accident or design clipped the only woman, and only non-white, audience member in the crowd across the face. She is a very slightly built woman, but she promptly jumped up and lamped Bennett back in the face and carried on giving him a number of blows. If you listen to the tape, you can hear all this going on, muffled shouting and the like, and it must have gone on for all of twenty seconds and constituted the 'riot' until some other audience members dragged her off him. Then the entire audience decamped, leaving six people there: a Metgumbnerbone, a New Blockader, and myself, plus Whitehouse, who to their credit played for maybe another twenty minutes. We suggested after that Whitehouse might come for a few drinks with us, but it emerged later that they were worried about getting beaten up and decided against it.

I came away from the event being very impressed by the intensity of the sound. Tomkins and Best were incredibly in sync and that made the bursts of noise very powerful, and though Bennett always said it was an accident that he hit anyone, it seemed a bit too coincidental. However, he certainly received more than he gave and amused us no end, even more so as the 'legend' grew.

ALAP: **And the grave-robbing?**

JS: **That is altogether a sadder episode. At the time it happened, we were all 'round at each other's houses, living pretty nocturnally, exploring the derelict houses and ruins of industry, making music, reading Poe, Lovecraft, and about magic and mysticism, etc., and generally having a good time. Everyone likes skulls and bones, and down the road was an old graveyard which the local council had thoroughly neglected and was in a shocking condition with toppled stones. It was, and still is, a hangout for alkies and druggies, so it seemed rude not to remove some thighbones and skulls, as almost anybody that wanted to could have done so anyway. So over a few nights or so, we did.**

By a weird quirk of fate, some hunt sabs (1) had recently also dug up a human corpse from a Durham cemetery, the recently-buried body of some old lady hunter as I remember, and there was, rightly, an outcry over it. We weren't especially discreet over our deed, and one of us was picked up by the police, who thought they had caught the Durham gang. They quickly realized that this was actually something they had previously known nothing about and began arresting us and raiding our flats. Of course, you can imagine the average policeman discovering a group of people who stayed up late, dressed in black, and liked all this 'weird stuff.' They seized a lot of books, ignoring the classical anthropological and mythology books like *The Golden Bough* or *White Goddess, Evans-Wentz, Mircia Eliade*, etc., in favour of *The Satanic Bible* and *Beyond Belief*, plus a stack of magazines and records, and generally tried to paint us as evil occultists by swapping evidence around to make sure everyone got tarred. They scrabbled about the law books for three days, and at that time you had to be charged within 24 hours of being arrested, so they had to go to the courts to get an order to allow them to keep us locked up. They eventually came up with the charges of grave-robbing, removal of a corpse from a tomb, and desecration. We got granted bail, but had curfew restrictions put on us that ran from 7 pm to 7 am, and we had to sign in at a police station twice a day. It took six months in all to get to court.

ALAP: **What was the outcome?**

JS: **No one had any idea what would happen to us, and our lawyers were useless, as they had no idea what to do. We told them of the 'Highgate Vampire' case from the '70s which had similar charges, but no one paid any attention to us. Sadly, our case went before a judge who was extremely religious, the type of person who sent poor pregnant shoplifters to jail for a month, so we were screwed. Ended up with one of us getting 18 months in jail, two others got a year each. Oddly, they were unemployed, while the 'nice' and 'led astray' university student, as our lawyer said, got community service. I got 140 hours of it! If I sound bitter about it 25 years later, I am. If I was cynical about the State and the police before, I was super-cynical afterwards. I distrust anyone in power who is doing something for 'our good.' They aren't, and if the State wants to, they will fuck you over big time. It is certainly odd to be part of the 'legend.' It still turns up in conversation sometimes, but I don't let on that I was part of it, not because I'm ashamed of it, just because it was a long time ago.**

ALAP: **Okay, back to the music. By the time Interchange #2 was published, you had moved on to starting your cassette label too, starting with the *Inter* compilation before putting out AOT and Ward Phillips. Can you tell us a little about that?**

JS: **This is a lot easier to answer. I simply liked the music and wanted it to be heard by more people. There was so much great music coming out of Newcastle at that time, and I listened to lots of stuff and thought others might like it. I made them the same way everyone else did, by copying them on a double-tape deck and photocopying the booklets. I wish the latter had been more extravagant, though. The compilation was sort of an introduction to the stuff I liked and wrote about, and if you liked that you might like AOT and Ward Phillips.**

ALAP: **Are you going to tell me a little about Ward Phillips? Other than that cassette, nobody knows anything about him.**

JS: **I suppose a quarter of a century on, I can finally say that Ward Phillips is me. I'm not a great self-promoter, and I thought it would be a bit odd to do a magazine and promote my own music. It would be better just to put it out under a pseudonym to avoid the embarrassment of having to hear your pals say that they liked it when maybe they didn't, and, of course, avoid having anyone tell you they hated it as they didn't know it was me. If I was ever to release something in the future, I would use a new name. I hate all that bollocks of "was in X band a billion years ago," as I automatically think, "Oh, you're trying to validate the shit you do now by reminding everyone how great you were in the past."**

ALAP: **One of the things that appeals to me about the likes of TNB and Zoviet France is the fact that there's such a wealth of quality ideas and work carried out with a poverty of equipment and resources. I'm not saying it was a Newcastle 'thing,' but have you any thoughts on that?**

JS: **I really don't believe that you should either be the 'starving musician in a garret' or hugely resourced to make good music. Listening back, those people whose music has stood the test of time really knew how to use what they had, rather than had a lot of stuff to use. The New Blockaders would always have done great music whatever the resources available. Zoviet France always seemed, to me, to have a stack of kit but could equally do a vast amount with just a tape deck and a few bells. As I mentioned before, the mighty Whitehouse sound was just a couple of WASP synths and William Bennett. To watch them live was astounding with everyone in perfect sync, fantastic discipline and control with a few simple resources. It shows that you don't need a lot of kit.**

Nowadays, lots of people have laptops and powerful music programs, which is great and a fantastic resource. But it doesn't mean that you can make good music, just that you, maybe, have the potential to.

ALAP: **Any good New Blockaders stories?**

JS: **I haven't seen a TNB gig since Morden Tower in the '80s (my wife saw them at the All Tomorrows Parties event at Minehead), but I do have so many great memories. I remember one TNB gig where they played as a trio, and somebody came up and asked, "Are you The New Blockaders?" "Oh yes," one replied. "He (points to one of them) is 'New,' he (points to another) is 'Block,' and I'm 'Aders'." That one still makes me laugh.**

ALAP: **Were there any others ideas that never took off? Curious as to why you didn't go on to release vinyl like your friends at Flowmotion?**

JS: **Records just seemed like a lot of work to do, and as I was unemployed and living on £50 a week, there was no way I was ever going to have the cash to do a record. And even if I did, what if it didn't sell? Also, by that time experimental music was becoming more mainstream via Dave Henderson's 'Wild Planet' pieces in Sounds, so there seemed less 'need' to make stuff available as many others were already doing.**

ALAP: **How open were you to including the work of outside contributors? The ones you used were people all considered knowledgeable in their fields of interests, such as David Minshall of Grok and Peter Harrison of Direction Music.**

JS: **Actually, I wasn't that open at all, but both David and Peter were primarily correspondents, though I realized pretty quickly that they had forgotten more about some things than I would ever know. Sadly, I never met Peter in person, though I did visit Dave once. He gave me two different ways to reach his place; one was via normal bus routes, and the other via the sewer system. I took the bus. He pretty much knew every archive in the area intimately, and his TG knowledge was phenomenal. We were both big fans. Peter's area was a bit outside mine, but you could tell it was phenomenal too. He had so much stuff that I had only ever heard of, ridiculously rare stuff.**

ALAP: **There's a good mixture of interview styles within the magazine — some carried out via post and others done face to face. Was that variety important to you at all?**

JS: **The variety wasn't that important, but I much preferred to meet people as often as possible, as the conversation took you down avenues you weren't expecting. Also, of course, you hoped that the makers were as interesting as their music, and they invariably were.**

ALAP: **With the third issue, you split it into two editions. Why was that? I originally assumed it was because you were unsure about having Whitehouse or AMM headlining that issue that caused you split it, but when you actually read through that issue, there's still a good mixture of improv, harsh, and synth styles covered anyway.**

JS: **At the time I did number three, I really loved Whitehouse and AMM and had interviewed both, but I couldn't decide which interview should be the 'major' one, like NWW in the first or SPK in the second issue, so I decided to use both equally. I had so much stuff anyway that I thought I would split the magazine into a 'noise' section and a more 'improvised' section. You can just about tell the difference, maybe? I suppose I could've held over stuff for another issue, but I was so bad at getting anything published at all that some of the material might have languished for months or years and would thus be totally out of date. I personally think issue three was the best one of the four, as it had a lot of content, reasonable print quality, and I liked the A5 format, too. It made it more pocket-sized and a bit more robust. It was also a lot cheaper to print.**

ALAP: **With the fourth issue, why did you opt for the Flowmotion retrospective and update? You dealt with those guys on a regular basis, and the issue covers the standard Flowmotion interests of TG, Burroughs, etc., across to the likes of Schnitzler.**

JS: **After the third one, I realized I had created a monster! How could I top sixty pages of content? It was about the time of the whole 'Wild Planet' thing too and I think I was beginning to feel a little redundant.**

Peter had this epic Schinitzler piece, and all the Flowmotions were out of print, and as I had always liked their magazine and had known both Ian and Gordon from the early days, I guess one of us said "How about it?" and I said "yes," so it sort of pleased everyone. I often went through Leeds (where they lived) en route to my parents out in 'hippy' Hebden Bridge. I still like it as an issue, but it certainly saved me trying to find thirty pages of really new and, above all, interesting stuff, though the Schnitzler piece is so revised and extended that it is a new article entirely. I would imagine it would still take some beating now.

ALAP: **You ceased publication after IC4. Why was that? Did you run out of steam and interest, or did you feel that the artists you had an interest in had started moving in a different direction to your interests? I know you had a fifth issue planned, and I'm guessing I'll never get to see that Mnemonists article you had lined up for it?**

JS: **By the time I had done the fourth issue, 'Wild Planet' was in full swing, and it gave lots of exposure to lots of bands that had the potential to be great, rather than actually being great. A lot of the music at that time sounded just terrible and hadn't moved on from TG, Whitehouse, or whatever, and as I thought about the next issue I realized I had a tiny shortlist, such as David Jackman, Mnemonists, er... that might have been it. I couldn't think of enough people I liked for ten pages, let alone sixty.**

ALAP: **You told me that you thought everything was losing its momentum by then too, with bands not living up to expectations, etc. Why do you think that was?**

JS: **With regards to losing interest, I think there were a number of reasons. Firstly, my own tastes were changing and I had begun listening to more medieval music, which has great instruments such as hurdy-gurdies which created a new area of sound. Secondly, my tastes had been influenced by groups such as Throbbing Gristle, Nurse With Wound, Whitehouse, Can, Kraftwerk and minimalist composers such as Riley and Reich. A lot of the new releases seemed to me to be derivative of these folks or influenced by early Sonic Youth, Swans and Butthole Surfers, i.e. rock 'n' roll. Don't get me wrong here: some of it was great music, but it certainly didn't inspire me. If I look back over the 'great' records for me, the ones that got played a lot, at least once a day for days on end, they would probably be, in a rough order: TG's *2nd Annual Report*, *The Velvet Underground & Nico*, SPK's *Leichenschrei*, 23 Skidoo's *Culling Is Coming*, Laurie Anderson's *Big Science*, Whitehouse's *Great White Death*, and Current 93's *Nature Unveiled*. Now one looks back and says, "oh, these are classic records of the time," but at that time they were just 'the latest albums we liked.' I'm sure any of us could do this and bring up a different list. Some of my friends were younger than me, and if you went and visited them they were being inspired by the early Sonic Youth material, etc. I guess it's just where you sit in each generation.**

ALAP: **Was there anybody you felt disappointed with?**

JS: **I'm not sure that 'disappointed with' is the right phrase. 'Un-engaged with,' 'bored by,' perhaps. I think some groups who couldn't 'play' anything did interesting music, until the moment they learned that they wanted to make rock 'n' roll. Nothing wrong in that, but not so interesting for me. Also, everyone gets older, your urges are lessened in many cases over time, and you discover that the world doesn't necessarily owe you a living, and that the 'great you' is not really a concern to others.**

ALAP: **A few years later, weren't you involved in that Earshot festival, about 1990? So you must've still had some interest later on?**

JS: **No, not at all. I wasn't involved with Earshot beyond helping out. Every now and again, I would hear or see something that I loved. C.O. Caspar's set for Earshot was amazing, it looked like it was some sort of industrial hoover as a sound generator, looped and treated. Étant Donnés covered in gold paint wrestling on a straw-strewn floor was fantastic. But you had to have been there. I still go to live events...Faust, fantastic. Merzbow, dull.**

ALAP: **You used Side Real as a name to publish IC under, and you still use it to this day, but not for music-related activities. You want to tell us more about that?**

JS: **Though I still love music, I have always been a big reader. I have read a lot of Crowley, Austin Spare, Anthropology, etc., and loved ghost and strange stories by the likes of M.R. James, Arthur Machen, Lovecraft and Thomas Ligotti. I also love books as objects, first editions, nice paper, good bindings and the like, and was taught bookbinding for a few years.**

I always thought it would be nice to publish books and, as with the magazine, Side Real publishes what it likes when it wants to. It is similar in many ways to David Tibet's Durtro Press or Tartarus Press. At present, I am slowly republishing work by Hanns Heinz Ewers, who was an extraordinary early-20th century German. A spy who knew Crowley, a Jew-loving writer of the official Horst Wessel myth for the Nazis, early film writer, drug (ab)user, critic, and traveler. Tales of sex, death, blood, and magic. He's pretty unknown in English and really expensive in the original translations.

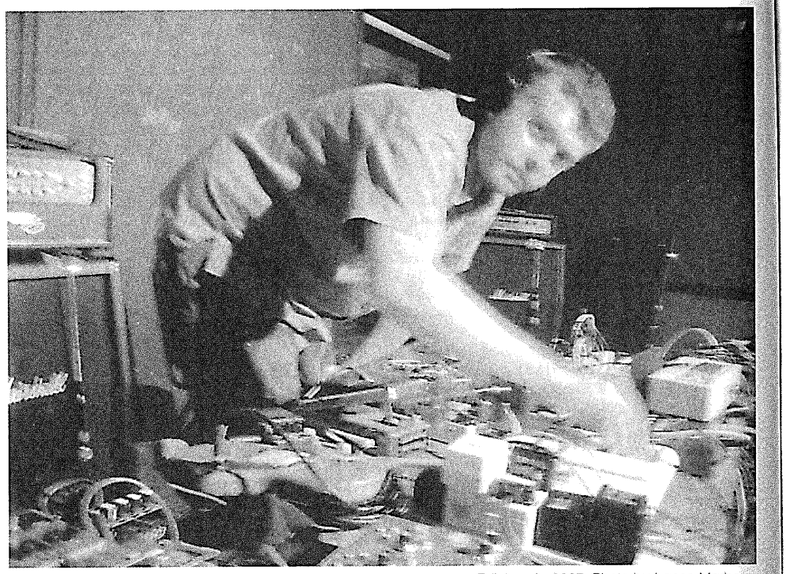
Now that I have a (sort of) job where I install art, I can squander my earnings on putting out books that will never sell — just like those records I never did!

Footnote:

(1) Hunt Sabs: Short for 'Hunt Saboteurs,' a term describing people and groups dedicated to protecting local animals from hunters.

PUTREFIER

MARK DURGAN INTERVIEWED
BY STEVE UNDERWOOD



Edinburgh. 2007. Photo by Lasse Marhaug

One of the more amusing moments caught during the last Putrefier trip around mainland Europe was when, after playing a show to commemorate the opening of an exhibition by Dennis Tyfus at a gallery space in Antwerp, Mark Durgan turned to thank the audience and added, tongue-in-cheek but with a slight sense of honest bewilderment, "I've been doing this for twenty years." This comment would flummox all but his most ardent cheerleaders, as his work under both the Putrefier moniker and, more recently, under his own name, has constantly evaded detection, but in an age where artists spend more time showboating their talents and, more importantly, their wares via a constantly accelerating internet PR machine in order to raise that all-important profile instead of attempting to actually earn their stripes, this relative anonymity helps make Putrefier one of the few genuinely curious anomalies operating today.

Even before he started the project, sometime during 1986, the ideas had been nibbling away for a while. "My formative influences came from various areas and I gravitated towards electronic music just because it seemed very new to me at the time, and I recall hearing various Krautrock acts such as Neu! and Kraftwerk, the latter appearing on TV from time to time with a home built drum pad device which I was struck by. Also, towards the end of 1980 and early 1981, a contemporary music-based BBC TV programme called *Something Else*, and then a more art-based one called *Riverside*, played videos of Cabaret Voltaire. The images and music were interesting to me, as were the videos." Catching these early images prompted yet more exploration, starting with the most obvious conduits of the time. "The only place to go and hear these 'different' sounds was the John Peel radio show, for such as Throbbing Gristle, SPK, Clock DVA, DAF, etc., and as nobody I knew was into, let alone had heard any of this stuff, I set about researching it further. The music papers Sounds and NME covered small amounts, and I had friends who were into Punk music and would buy fanzines that I'd leaf through. They usually covered TG and Industrial Records to some degree, which I was, by then, already familiar with, but I was not really aware of a scene that had developed around, on and from this, and whom some were in total opposition to." A little deeper digging brought forward the push needed to start on his own project. "I came across magazines like Re-Search, Tone Death, Flowmotion, Grok and Interchange, the latter two having a big leaning towards the avant garde and Power Electronics scene of that time, covering Nurse With Wound, United Dairies, The New Blockaders, Come Org., Maurizio Bianchi, etc. and these groups fuelled my imagination, even though I was yet to hear them. John Smith from Interchange mailed me a cassette of Broken Flag's *Neuengamme* compilation, which was all the convincing I needed to hear more, so I got in touch with Gary Mundy and slowly bought up what I could afford from his label plus other enlightening distribution items. Around this time that TNB/Organum 'Pulp' 7-inch and Ferial Confine's *Meiosis* were more than enough inspiration to start forming ideas to make my own recordings."

Taking the inspiration from these sources as well as lifting a few pointers towards the right equipment to use, Durgan began to explore the possibilities opened up to him. "I started out with a couple of cheap synths, a Jen SX-1000 and a Korg MS-10, reel-to-reel, digital delay and some effect pedals, then being able to multitrack by linking up two cassette players into an old tape deck." The Jen was then just about the cheapest synthesizer available on the market and had a well-earned (poor) reputation, so was traded back in for a basic four-channel mixer and that other Power Electronics standard, the EDP Wasp synth. This equipment formed the basis of the early cassette releases. Even if the fanzine U-Bahn was happy to praise the *Beyond Scathing* cassette for its ability to "elaborate on the existing tradition of violent sound" he just dismisses it as his following of a certain genre formula. But even if, in parts, it feels like tracing footsteps, there's still enough diversions offered to curious listeners, ones stamped with his own print, and amongst the lurch and rumble of these recordings you will find enough pointers towards future works, especially on the Broken Flag cassette (*Cog Dominance*, 1987). Still, it's rather easy to pinpoint these cassettes down to the latter half of the eighties. Sometime in the near future, Freak Animal will be wrapping up these recordings as a retrospective set.

Having set up Birthbiter in 1986 with the intention of releasing his own work and that of others, it soon became very clear that this wasn't going to be the case. "The idea was to release a lot, but the amount of quality stuff was not forthcoming, so I kept it fairly small." Still, other people's material did find a home on the imprint; some of Matthew Bower's work as Pure was featured, and Anthony DiFranco's Ethnic Acid project produced a couple of cassettes, as well as a collaboration work with Putrefier. "Ethnic Acid went on to play in Skullflower and Ramleh and got more into guitar-based sludge rock and moved away from electronics for a while. I think his recordings of noise were not so far removed from what people like Fennesz is doing today, but obviously not in a digital medium." With the expansion of the label to becoming a distribution outlet, the input and flux of new influences and ideas increased as the mailorder operation started dealing out what nowadays would read like a record collector's dream list. "This started about the same time as the label did and there was a heavy leaning towards Broken Flag recordings, but I had stuff coming in from Dom US and Germany, Korm Plastics, Club Moral and Force Mental, MB, Esplendor Geometrico, RRRecords, ZSF Produkts, Selektion, Coup De Grace, S*Core, Merzbow, Mixed Band Philanthropist, Gerogerigegege, NEdS and Andrew Chalk, amongst others. Music wasn't the sole concern, as I also sold books and magazines dealing with interests in mail art, mixed media, underground films, performance and Aktionism. The distribution slipped for a while at the start of the '90s but took off again about '93 with the Japanese noise material. This eventually led to [the mailorder's] downfall, due to continuous VAT, customs and postal charges which couldn't make it viable anymore. Trying to sell a CD for £16 and cassettes for £9 wasn't going to happen, so it folded." The label seemed to disappear too, with Durgan claiming that "Birthbiter is still alive, but not very active." Not making any money towards promotion and advertising costs wouldn't help matters either.

Though originally conceived as just a home recording project, a chance was offered for Putrefier to move out onto the live circuit, further cementing his links with the mail network. "My first show was put on by Mike Dando of Con-Dom back in 1988, and was in the upstairs room of a Birmingham pub which was slap bang in the middle of a patch of waste ground. Putrefier 'headlined' as Ramleh had to catch a train back to London whilst Con-Dom fronted the evening. It was a small but enthusiastic gathering and the experience was great, as the venue was full of bikers sporting Ramleh and Come Org badges." With the roots of Putrefier being grounded in the climate of Power Electronics, ideas about development were underway too, although these would take a few more years yet to fully come through. "The late '80s and the start of the '90s were a real dead period for music that I wanted to hear, so I stopped buying and listening to records and stopped recording for a short while. Plus, a few life changes happened and other things took priority. I don't feel very nostalgic for that music I produced; as with most things, it has its place in history. I'd say the next release is always the one to watch for." This lack of nostalgia also extends to some other music of the time. "The UK scene has, on the whole, been covered quite comprehensively. A few groups played a very low-key role at one time or another, including Mme. Sadie, Seven - Horns Da Ho, Surgical Division, Psychopath, Depilate Corps, Ashenden, etc., but most of it has been documented at a more or lesser degree. If stuff has been ignored, it's due to the obvious reason." His first record, the self- released 'Pray for Fire' 7-inch, was the final line in the sand for any Power Electronics connection, even if parts of the later Bâtarr retrospective CD release (*Cilium to MKD Structure*, 1996) crisscrossed timelines. The former release still offers its creator a little embarrassment.

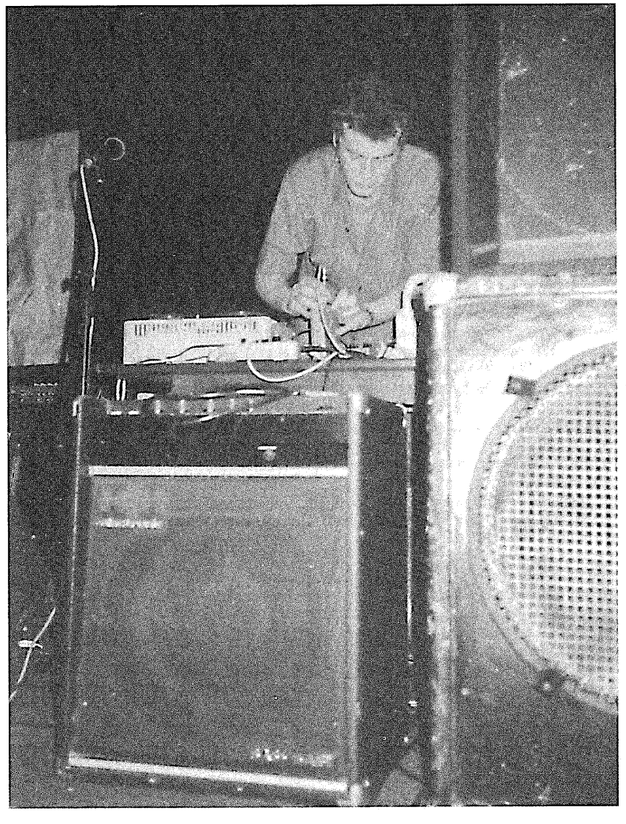
The rejuvenation process presented by exposure to the burst of Japanese noise at the start of the '90s was responsible for kick-starting the Putrefier project out of its lethargy, even if the name was kept on as a handy catchall. "I do think the name has a certain limited target audience and probably at one time or another has been a great millstone, and I do object to the 'Industrial' tag that I'm sure it understandably gets. It is hard to shake associations and change people's preconceptions of this. I guess I've stuck with it more as a testament to the longevity of the project, from being a teenager onwards, ties to the past and the '80s PE and Noise scene. It's been long overdue for a name change," adding, "...whether I'd go and see an act with a similar name is debatable!" When asked about where the name originated from, Durgan says he is "not too sure now of the true origins, but I wrote a tract for an unpublished Broken Flag magazine called 'The Putrefier' which I seem to recall was along the lines of it being an attack on the upholders of morality."

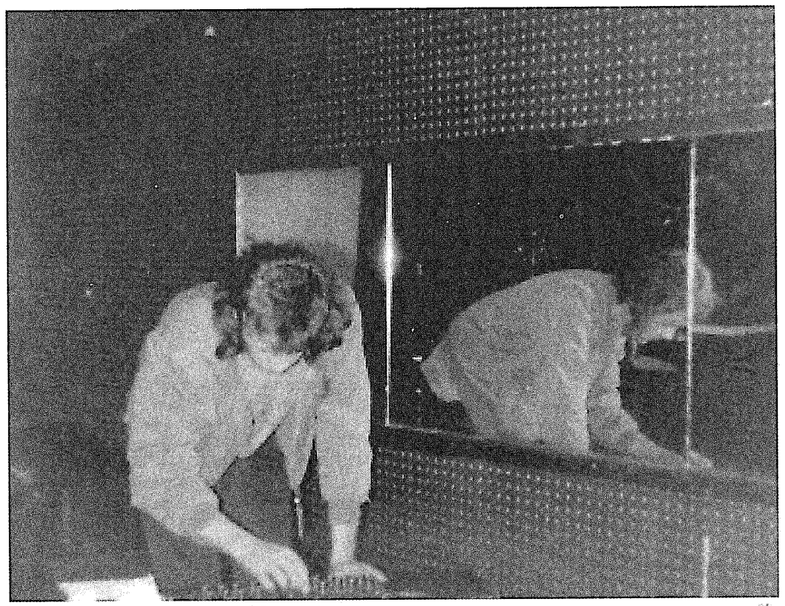
Not only did the first half of the decade present more live show opportunities, but the chance to work alongside like-minded individuals like Andy Bolus, who was very active with his Evil Moisture project and known as much for his amusing artwork and design concepts as his sonic cutups. The duo christened themselves as Olympic Shit Man. "My first contact with Andy Bolus was from Bananafish and a review of Bolus's films in some godawful horror fanboy magazine. We both lived relatively close in south London, and quickly realised we shared similar interests in music, films and beer." The pair soon started working together on recordings. "Andy's approach to recording was laborious, obsessive and shambolic, so it seemed more than appropriate that we record and get some material together for a cassette which MSNP released as *Supercharge*. The artwork is a classic slice of Bolus on the front, whilst the rear featured a former housemate who wasn't too happy about his two minutes in the limelight." The project continued with a few shows around the UK, and, at times, as the unlikeliest of support acts. "One of those shows was as support to Derek Bailey; our performance managed to add another dimension to the grimace on his face." The duo successfully resurrected the project for a few dates around Europe towards the end of 2006.

Many more shows followed throughout the latter part of the decade, mostly within the confines of London, with some of the most memorable being alongside the Schimpfluch-Gruppe and MSBR, as well as a live collaboration with Thirdorgan which was captured on a very limited lathe-cut 12-inch record. As much fun as these shows may have been, the poverty of the equipment proved too much. "Playing live with a broken Walkman, reel-to-reel, and a karaoke toy woke me up with a clarion call to get some new equipment. Around 1998, I started buying gear again to gain fresh inspiration, mostly second-hand items, and I still haven't brought anything new for quite a while now. I prefer to build and modify sound devices than look for the latest pedal, as you can start sounding, if you're not careful, like a hundred other people with a string of DOD and Boss pedals."

The end of the '90s not only brought about an influx of newer equipment, but a stronger, concentrated approach, making the space, and even silences between sounds, an integral part of his constructions. "Most people who create noise see saturation as the primary goal and nothing else, which I don't have a lot of interest in. That space between loud and quiet, harsh or soft, that juxtaposition between the transformation process is what I'll use as finished recordings, and it's difficult to convey that if the sounds are overloaded. My priority is to make 'junk sounds,' be they acoustic or electronic, so it's important to have focus and clarity in order to produce this." Durgan, like a lot of sound artists, will take an idea of a certain sound and build around it. "Sometimes, I'll start with a sound and pass it around various feedback networks until I'm happy with the variation, then it'll go back in again through another route. I like the idea of recycling material through more processing, but don't wish to repeat ideas. I do try not to use the same sounds on different tracks, though that has occasionally happened. After I've recorded a CDr, I'll usually play it back through again, more as a case of fragmenting material as much as possible until it loses resemblance of the original sound. Also, the environments I record in are as important as the sounds, and I try to record as much outside as I can, and it's also in order to have multiple dimensions running through my tracks. Most of the time, I welcome elements that rub up against each other and don't quite fit. I used to have a very brutalist approach to both playing and recording which took the shape of overloading sound and cutting off in fits and starts to try and give an impression of urgency and spontaneity. It took me quite a while to realise how unworkable that situation could become." Sometimes, that obsessive attention to a certain detail can take away the human element of the work and replace it with something sterile-sounding, a criticism that has been leveled at some aspects of the Putrefier sound. However, the overall effect of one of Durgan's recordings is akin to hearing Voice Crack attempting to hotwire a pinball machine, and then taking it straight into a slice 'n' dice collision with Merzbow's *Rainbow Electronics* whilst the shrapnel is spat out at seemingly random tangents. Examples of this electronic crossfire are best found on the *Simulated Vapours* album, and the mail exchanges carried out in 2000 with K2 after a trip to Japan. The latter recording was originally lined up for release on the sadly-absent Steve Fricker's Cheeses International label, but the collaboration work finally found a home on Gods of Tundra only

Nottingham. 1996. Photo by Steve Underwood





Wolverhampton. 1988. Photo by Neil Campbell

recently, albeit limited to 200 copies. The four-disc *Hypertension Classics* set could be considered Durgan's boldest, most extravagant statement, showcasing nearly every aspect of the Putrefier thought process and giving glimpses into the next stage of the project's metamorphosis via the thirty minute excursion through a live recording captured during a visit to Finland in 2000.

The lack of concrete documentation, both written and recorded, could be construed as an attempt at mystery, but the reality is that it all comes down to a total ambivalence about having a public persona. This lack of a public face comes across with the vague artwork used on his releases, too. "There's no intentional 'mystery' agenda going on, but the ambiguity is intentional. The potency of those early MB albums and his minimalist approach to artworks made a big impression, plus there's an unconscious Duchampian thought process in an attempt, and it's probably unachievable to remove my own personal identity from the object." The humour which at times rears its head throughout some of the recordings might make the comment about removing his personality seem a little lightweight. Drop in anywhere on the Putrefier discography and you will find humour, both playful and obscure, with track titles like 'Environment of the Modern Day American Gorgon,' 'Lummox Hydrolicks,' and 'Ham-fisted Drainage,' and it can found even on the Restaurant Nada labels adorning the TNB collaboration LP, poking fun at that artist's theories of 'nothingness.' Again, Durgan puts this down to something less complex. "I have words and phrases going through my head, and rarely write things down, so when I come across other words I join them into a sentence, and if it sounds out of context it usually gets used. There's no real separation between absurdist context or serious content, which is what is dictated when listening to a track. It's a very similar way to how I record."

Some could accuse Durgan of having lofty pretensions whilst still having both feet dipped firmly within Noise culture. "I do feel disassociated with a lot of noise, but that's more to do with the overbearing use of clichés within the artwork and other teenage juvenilia, and I really would just like to distance myself from those aspects that some people still use within this scene. If I was to view my position, I'd say I feel I'm more of an outsider and aligned to the older sound poets. Although their realm of art is very different to that of Putrefier, comparisons are very similar with the rawness and hands-on approach. Also, this extends to the more improvised Musique Concrète approach various people still employ today where, for instance, the live use of reel-to-reel editing is still crucial in a laptop-dominated era. Nothing against that, but to see someone being adept, skilled and knowledgeable with their own instruments is far more inspiring."

As anyone who has caught more than a handful of Putrefier shows will attest, the amount of gear used for a performance can be a minimal stripped-down setup or extend over two tables with a ludicrous collection of gadgets and pedals. Doubts could be cast about how much control he commands over the equipment as well as steering the sound in the required direction. Durgan admits that "The live sound can very complicated at times, plus the fact that I change the equipment setup from show to show means it can get a little confusing. Usually beforehand, I'll think about what to take to the show, starting off with a simple idea for the sound and minimal use of equipment, but, at times, by the time I've done rerouting the signal in various areas, the equipment has amassed." Having seen performances both enhanced and undone by masses of gizmos, it is tempting to question the value of such logic, and Durgan agrees to an extent. "Sometimes there will be too many inputs. I'm trying to reduce these now, but it is hard to do so as I think this all adds to the spontaneity of the sound, which I find really inspiring about playing live." But he is lighthearted about the possible ruination of a performance too. "I intend to scale down a lot more in the future, though I have been saying that for the last eight years." As Putrefier is still effectively a studio-based project, an element of chance is always going to be present with any performance. "I'm building up tracks from the beginning with loops, samples or acoustic sounds, then the sound will become quite automated due to the influence of the feedback generated from the devices. Some of the performance is an exercise in returning the sound back to its beginning and adding a little more on top of that. If it starts going in a random direction, I get more frustrated with it, so I try and keep restraints on it as much as I can, which is a task in itself." Some of the performances could end up with Durgan rolling around amongst the audience. "It changes for each show, depending usually on how happy or engrossed I am with the sound. So if everything's coming together and doing what I want it to do, I tend to get a little more carried away, though sometimes I may compensate for a bad sound and try and get some audience interaction going. I'd like people to enjoy their night out and not be bored."

Even with doing plenty of live shows, Durgan still holds sway with the viewpoint that breaking out, or away, from the noise world's DIY sphere and onto the art gallery and festival circuit is mostly down to networking and nepotism more than any given talents, and with lots of curators also looking overseas instead of their own doorsteps, this cynicism is well-founded. "Yes, a large part is down to those traits, but there will always be artists operating in different areas outside of the art confines. I couldn't really see, for instance, Wolf Eyes playing in a gallery, as they're suited to bigger venues. I've played in very few galleries, even though I feel more suited to that environment." In an attempt to stray from his one-man operation and offer the project out to the wider world, the last couple of years have seen the acceptance of the collaboration hand taken up with more vigour than ever before. Not only dropping into live performances by Ashtray Navigations and Bill Kouligas' Family Battle Snake, unhinging both a little more with his presence, but also taking place within a live setting alongside Jazkamer, as well as Dean Glaister's Romance project, with projected recordings of both due at some point. Perhaps the most striking team-up of recent was the work done with The New Blockaders. "That collaboration was very successful and compares as one of my all-time favorite recordings. This was made as more of an homage to *Changez les Blockeurs*, and the recordings were made up of environmental sounds, mainly from a visit to Croatia, manipulated and edited together. Very little electronics were used, which was a conscious decision so as to replicate, as much as possible, the true nature of those recordings and capture the spirit of that first Blockaders album." The saga with The New Blockaders continues, apparently.

A couple of years back, a conscious decision was made to attempt to alter both the way he approached his work and people's preconceptions by starting to work under his own name, in the same way Joe Colley and Damion Romero had done before, with a view to not only, perhaps, be taken a little more seriously but to also present a less expected angle of his work, one less grounded, and therefore restricted, within a noticeable Noise framework. This suggests that maybe doubts do exist about the Putrefier moniker. These latest recordings are informed by a caustic patience and steady pacing as we accompany Durgan on his landfill site explorations. The album on Pan perhaps offers the better porthole into this world, although the single on No-Fi captures a short cohesive slice very well. These works, taken along with recent Putrefier outbursts, offer up the current wide variety of sounds produced, and show little sign of imaginative redundancy. "I think that the concept of Putrefier is still pretty similar, inasmuch as I wanted to create junk-styled electronic noise as opposed to a regimented Power Electronics sound. When I started out, I was emulating, to greater or lesser degrees, a particular style, and as I moved on from the influences of PE and more into Noise, like when the Japanese Noise scene took off in the early nineties and, again, I felt quite invigourated by it as I had done when I heard those early records back in the mid-eighties. But again, there were certain limitations of producing a sound within a particular style. Nowadays, there is such a blurring of styles that genres that were more defined, and you thought might be dismissed by more snobbish individuals, are quite acceptable to the norm now, so a more freeform approach has been developed right across the board now, be it for good or bad."

When questioned about how he views not only the progression of the Noise circuit since his fledgling days, but also the apparent popularity that parts of it have gained, it's not given too short a shrift. "I think the main change is how fashionable the whole thing has become, but not so much of in terms of audience attendance, just the posturing that goes on. It's hilarious to see blokes start punching the air, with some primordial instinct at the remotest sound of a buzzing amp. The audience should be a lot more discerning and raise their own expectations higher." But still he considers the overall picture a bit more positive. "Recent shows have seen a vast new crop of acts coming through from all sorts of areas and backgrounds, which is good to see. Of course, fresh blood is necessary for any scene to be vibrant and keep audiences interested, and I'm still excited about noise music, but am inspired by different areas of the avant garde spectrum. Recordings of musique concrète, improvisation, electro acoustics, sound poetry, etc., be it from the 1950s or the present day. There's no way I would've sustained a need to do Putrefier as long as I have if I was still listening to the same things and hadn't been able to appreciate other forms of experimentation." And he's still a regular consumer, buying and researching as much as he finds possible. "I've been buying up Dadaist and Fluxus nonsense more than Noise nowadays, and I do enjoy being blasted by both new and old stuff, such as Jean-Baptiste Barriere's *Pandemonium*, Wolf Vostell's *De/Collage*, Henning Christiansen, and many releases from Alga Marghen, Slowscan, Erstwhile, For4Ears, Schimpfluch, Michael Prime's *Borneo* CD, and lots more besides." These developments with the ongoing process of the listening experience leave Durgan opened up with more options for his own works. "I'm very much into music that has several dimensions to it, and am inspired by a lot of digitally recorded sound. It's important for me now that the recordings I create are as clear as possible. I'm not too into the lo-fi stuff now, as it's important that the physical dimensions of sound come through in my work. It's just a natural progression in wanting to understand and explore motivations behind my work."

Looking forward to a fresh round of new releases, Durgan seems very positive about the future. "There's no reason to discontinue, but I think there will be more releases under my own name as opposed to Putrefier. It's difficult to say in which direction I'd like to progress, apart from keeping the sound vibrant, as there is no goal as such. I'll continue regardless until there is no further personal stimulation and interest. It's my life's work, and I'll see it out to its conclusion."

OLYMPIC SHIT MAN
BY ANDY BOLUS

Evil Moisture's attic studio. London. 1995. Photo by Andy Bolus

Andy Bolus got involved with the Olympic Shit Man (OSM) project as it enabled him to produce his work in a looser way, freeing him from the precise and intricate way he would normally operate. Here, he recalls his time as part of that duo:

"The name came from what Mark said was a cartoon character that ran around the streets shitting himself, some kind of mascot for the Spanish Olympics.

The cover image on the Supercharge cassette was from a comic I bought whilst in Madrid in the early '90s, something like the Italian version of Fluide Glaciale or Heavy Metal, but I can't remember the name. The photo on the back is Mark's old housemate Glen, and yes, he was pretty pissed off about it.

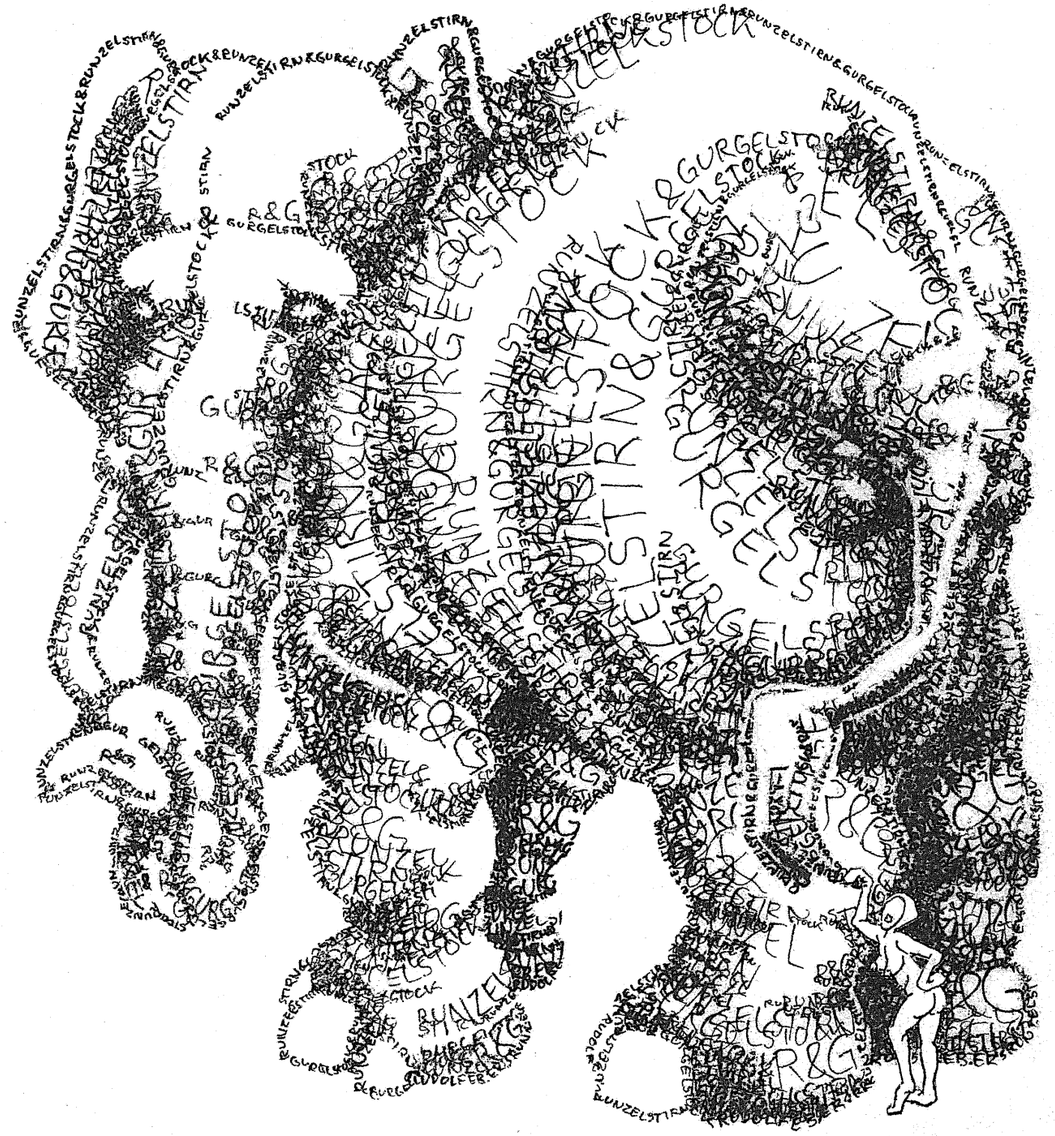
The audio was edited down from various recording sessions, plus the live recording from Bar Sate, done at my old place in Greenwich, which was basically a tiny triangular-shaped bit of floor-space, accessible by a ladder and trapdoor above the bathroom that wasn't used, so I made a floor and soundproofed it with carpets and cardboard. The only problem was there was no ventilation, so if someone took a shower...free sauna!

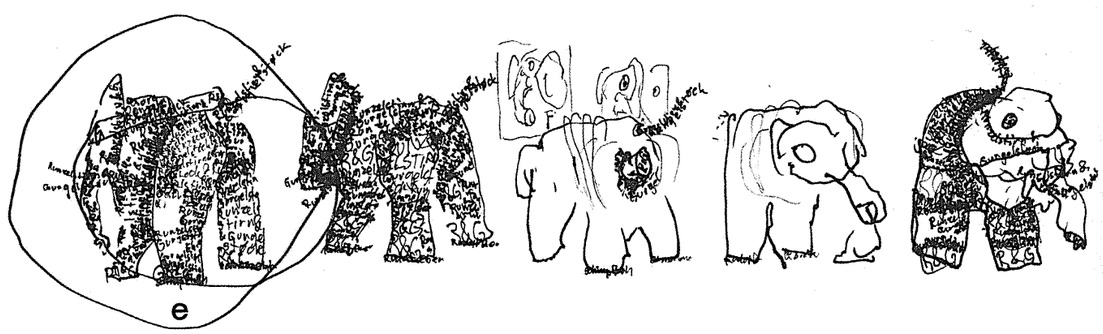
There was lots of scrap metal junk and the remains of machines I built. I still had my EMS synth at the time, before I sold it and wasted all the money on a holiday to Amsterdam with Mark and Glen, and the tape is pretty heavy on that.

The only other thing that came out, much more recently but of old material, is Carnel Hostess Halitosis — *Live Run in Storialpolis Greece*, a CDr on Stomach Ache, which is sort of 50/50 Evil Moisture and OSM, but all chopped together by some goddamn Mexican. I have no idea if we even did this?

The first show was at Bar Sate, a kinda squatty place in Brixton, around 1995, which had a Nomex installation upstairs between the kitchen and bar area. Audio consisted of amplified preparation of beetroot soup — maybe with barium in it? — and the food was delivered through a tube into the bar area and the lucky diner could watch an x-ray of it going down his, or her, throat. He used to work at a hospital and borrowed all sorts of weird shit. Anyway, I'm sure they made good money that night?

The second was in Nottingham, opening for Ramleh. Fun times, except for getting woken by Emerson, Lake & Palmer at 8 the next morning. Third was opening for the Schimpfluch - Gruppe, in Leeds, I think? The only thing I remember was hearing someone say "Olympic SHIT!" If there were any more shows, I really can't remember."





DIRECT EFFECTIVENESS:

ARTAUD, AKTIONSKUNST, ABREACTION AND EB.ER
OR
THE SHAMAN-CLOWN IN THE THEATRE OF CRUELTY

RUNZELSTIRN & GURGELSTOCK

Indeed, philosophically speaking, what is cruelty? From a mental viewpoint, cruelty means strictness, diligence, un-relenting decisiveness, irreversible and absolute determination.
(Artaud 1993:70)

abreaction (ab-reaction) n. psychoanal. The release and expression of emotional tension associated with repressed ideas by bringing those ideas into consciousness.
(HarperCollins 1995:4)

[…] Eb.er's assertions that he is not kidding and that this is "not a joke" (1), combined with his accomplice's increasing exhaustion to the point of breakdown, pushes the recording ever closer to the limit of the impossible real.
(Daniel 2003:22)

Envisioning avant-garde theatre in Paris during the 1930s might seem far removed from the many and varied works of *Aktionskunst* (and related activities) performed currently worldwide. (2) **In a thoroughly prodded artistic climate such as the present, roughly seventy years after the first publication of *Le Théâtre et son Double* by Antonin Artaud (1896 -1948), we are in a position to connect, compare and contrast present-day Euro-Japanese Action Art alongside 1920s / '30s French Surrealist Performance theorem: this makes it possible to view the work of Rudolf Eb.er (b.1967) through the lens of Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty' manifestos and related writings. The physical and intellectual relationships of these forms are complex and diverse, as are the drives, histories and mindset of each artist involved; and yet similarities are in evidence. Undoubtedly, respective forms of these practices will continue to evolve, momentarily clash and share paths, exhibiting art's viral nature.**

By its own disposition, Surrealist Theatre has concerned itself with various assaults, comments and experiments on the human cognitive process and our general perceptual understanding. Engaging with notions of (to use more of Freud's animals) the subconscious and/or the repressed has included tendencies towards the invasion of 'safe' audience territory, or indeed a direct 'attack' on the spectators. (3) **Bearing this in mind, there appears to be a particular thread of intercultural Surrealist discourse running between 1930s France, 1960s Austria and the collected work of a Swiss-born Austrian artist living and working in present-day Japan. We might consider that Japan has nursed and nurtured its own Surrealism and/or abject art tendency, creating a receptacle for ostensibly 'difficult' art.** (4) **It is here that we find the challenging and protean work of Rudolf Eb.er.**

To define a connection between Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty propositions in *The Theatre and its Double* and the current works prevalent as a mutation/continuation of the Austrian *Aktionskunst* tradition, we will look at a piece of live work from Eb.er's Runzelstirn & Gurgelstock project ('Aktion für Hahn und Krüppel,' Japan, 2003). Yet, it will be necessary to touch upon other R&G works simply because they too can be read as displaying important reflections of many Theatre of Cruelty sensibilities.

Artaudian principle has not been an ingredient consciously used by Eb.er in his work (but he says that he may have read some Artaud in the past). (5) **His inspiration gathers from elsewhere and his roots are composted in an obscure mixture that includes skilled chirurgical drawing, painting, photography, an intense, almost love-hate relationship with traditional Austrian music (yodelling and 'Humpa,' for example), involvement with the Industrial / Noise music scene (again, not an easy relationship – he "hates noise"); and all of this with an affinity and affiliation to the confrontational style of the Material Actions created by the Viennese Actionists in the 1960s.** (6) **So, the influence is not direct; yet upon reading Artaud's propositions for the Theatre of Cruelty, the spirit of the text is directly comparable to elements of Eb.er's work. Somewhere within Eb.er's work, as within the work of the Vienna Actionists (and quite without intention), echoes and shadows of Artaudian principle are manifest. There is also a fairly even chronological positioning between all three parties.**

I have drawn heavily on the 1993 publication of Artaud's *The Theatre and its Double* and a 2001 Wire magazine article on Eb.er's work, "Aktion Time Vision" by Drew Daniel. Other sources are as defined in the bibliography. Although the second quote in this essay is a dictionary definition of a psychoanalytical term (and one certainly relevant to our subjects), I will not be venturing far into the respective *personal* psychological worlds of Antonin Artaud, the Viennese Actionists or Rudolf Eb.er, although that would make a fascinating and fruitful study. Here we aim to look at a kinaesthetic or physiological aspect running throughout the Theatre of Cruelty manifestos, and tangible (yet quite possibly unintentional) reflections of that aspect within the work of 1960s Viennese Actionism, and specifically within Eb.er's work (1980s – present day).

ARTAUD'S THEATRE OF CRUELTY AND ACTIONISM IN VIENNA

Our sensibility has reached the point where we surely need theatre that wakes us up heart and nerves…. Our longstanding habit of seeking diversions has made us forget the slightest idea of serious theatre which upsets all our preconceptions, inspiring us with fiery, magnetic imagery and finally reacting on us after the manner of unforgettable soul therapy.
(Artaud 1993:64)

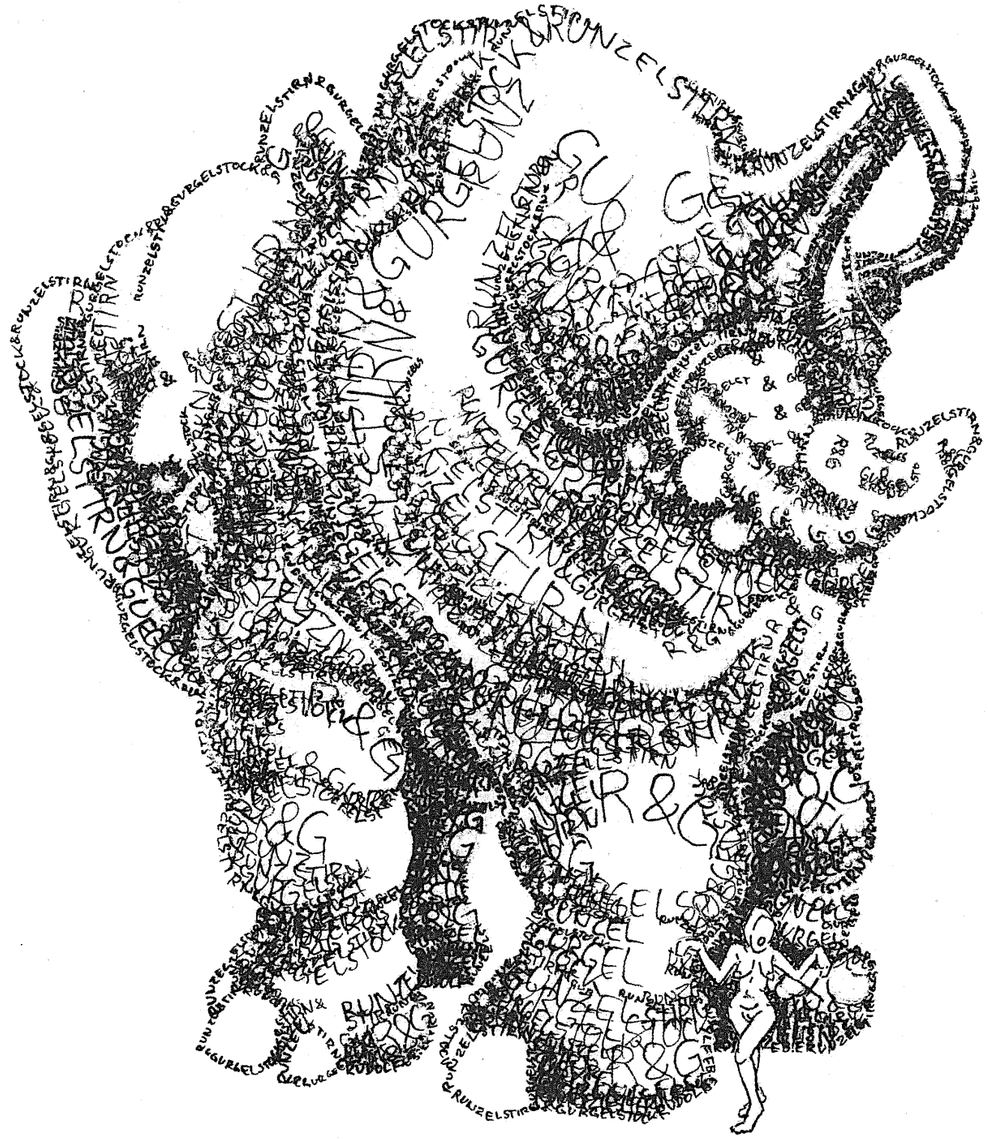
In France during the 1930s, Artaud forged polemical and revolutionary texts concerning his grievance and disenchantment with popular theatre culture. He denounced and accused it of ignoring possibilities for a vital communication, of being a shallow form dedicated to superficial entertainment and distraction, of appealing pointedly to only a fragment of human consciousness. Artaud's complaints emerged from his belief that theatre should hold more of a *shamanic* function in society (if we consider the last three words of the previous quote) and argued that theatre must reconnect with some kind of moral obligation to speak to the entirety of the human being and presence. He heralded a model that was to draw from pools of Oriental theatre, sensory assault, and ritual, one that would appeal to a deeper consciousness. He named his model the Theatre of Cruelty. In his second manifesto for the Theatre of Cruelty, he writes, "If the nerves, that is to say a certain physiological sensitivity are deliberately omitted from today's after-dinner theatre, or left to the spectator's personal interpretation, the Theatre of Cruelty intends to return to all the tried and tested magic means of affecting sensitivity." (Artaud 1993:84) "Repudiating psychological man with his clear-cut personality and feelings, it will appeal to the whole man, not social man submissive to the law, warped by religions and precepts." (Artaud 1993:81)

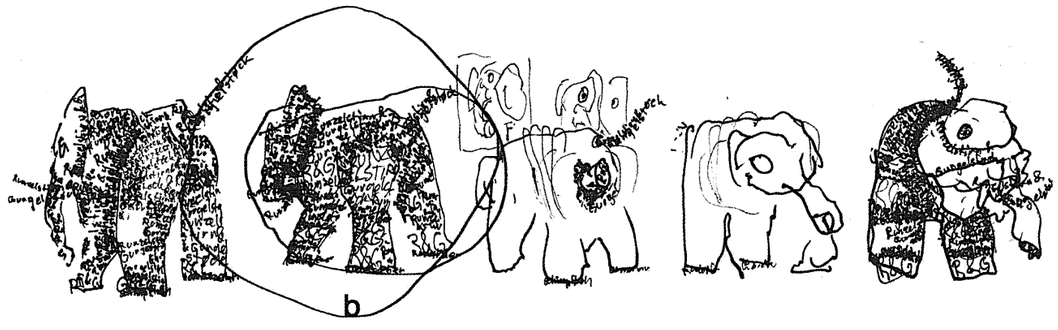
Artaud's principle aim was to affect the audience deeply through systematically exposing them to this "certain physiological sensitivity," utilizing "a non-virtual but real language using man's nervous magnetism…. to transgress the ordinary limits of art and words, actively, that is to say magically to produce a kind of total creation in real terms, where man must reassume his position between dreams and events." (Artaud 1993:71) Appealing to physical sense and its capacity for direct interpretation rather than what he saw as shallow entertainment in the form of mild psychological play. In 1931, he attended a Balinese theatre production in Paris; here, he gleaned crucial influence from the esoteric style and effect typical of Oriental theatre, and hoped to inject Western theatre with the same life-affirming, and essentially shocking, methodologies:

There is something about a spectacle like the Balinese theatre which does away with entertainment, that useless artificiality, an evening's amusement so typical of our own theatre. Its productions are hewn out of matter itself before our eyes, in real life itself. There is something of a religious ceremony about them, in the sense that they eradicate any idea of pretence, a ridiculous imitation of real life, from the spectator's mind. This involved gesticulation we see has a goal, an immediate goal towards which it aims by effective means, and we are able to experience its direct effectiveness. The thought it aims at, the states of mind it attempts to create, the mystical discoveries it offers are motivated and reached without delay or periphrasis. It all seems like an exorcism to make our devils FLOW.
(Artaud 1993:42)

Through this application of direct communication or shock, bypassing the limitations of unexceptional spoken language and instead speaking to and through the physical senses, Artaud imagined a theatrical technique of speaking *through* the body in order to connect and communicate *to* (in a cryptic and profound method) the mind. A collection of his writings composing dramaturgical formulae were brought together and published in 1938 as *The Theatre and its Double*. The sections that mainly interest us here are his writings on the Theatre of Cruelty; the intrinsic physicality of the Theatre of Cruelty began its life embedded in the written word.

The inclusion in this appellation of the word 'cruelty' signified a shifting of the word's common definition (as a plain mean-spirited gesture), into representing a form of discipline. Artaud asked that "the word cruelty must be taken in its broadest sense, not the physical, predatory sense usually ascribed to it. And in so doing, I demand the right to make a break with its usual verbal meaning…. I use the word cruelty in the sense of hungering after life, cosmic strictness, relentless ne-





cessity, in the Gnostic sense of a living vortex engulfing darkness, in the sense of the inescapably necessary pain without which life could not continue."
(Artaud 1993:79-80)

Susan Sontag opens the 1976 edition of Artaud's *Selected Writings* (inclusive of the Theatre of Cruelty manifestos) with an essay in which she highlights specific domains of Artaud's contemplations. These include his constant struggle with notions of 'mind' versus 'body,' the inseparable nature of the two in order to produce a 'total' experience, and the counterproductive and possibly maddening attempt to explain through words that which cannot be explained in words (because it is *not that*). It would seem that only "this naked theatre language" (Artaud 1993:71) could act upon a person in a whole sense:

In Artaud's poetics, art (and thought) is an action – and one that, to be authentic, must be brutal – and also an experience suffered, and charged with extreme emotions. Being both action and passion of this sort, iconoclastic in its fervour, art seems to require a more daring scene, outside the museums and legitimate showplaces, and a new, ruder form of confrontation with its audience.
(Sontag 1976:xxix)

One cannot separate body and mind, nor the senses from the intellect, particularly in a field where the unendingly repeated jading of our organs calls for sudden shocks to revive our understanding.
(Artaud 1993:66)

His ideas called for a change in Western notions of theatre and performance practices. Although the Theatre of Cruelty may never have been fully physically realized within his own lifetime, his clandestine approach and basic principles unquestionably contributed (alongside countless things) to the defining contours of many current performance art practices. Since its publication *The Theatre and its Double* has influenced, informed and shaped. It was a theoretical preamble for avant-garde theatre and performative culture, including the American 'Happenings' of the 1960s. These innovations and experiments often resembled a strong incarnation of Artaud's words as Michael Kirby notes in the book *Happenings and Other Acts*:

A very important formative factor deriving from theatre was the publication in 1958 of an English translation of 'The Theatre and Its Double' by Antonin Artaud. The single spectacle that is described (The Conquest of Mexico) is not a Happening, but the general theory propounded in the book is almost a text for Happenings. Artaud, an actor-director-playwright-poet, was essentially a man of the theatre. Although his scripts make use of Surrealist dream matrices and, like Schwitters, he was never able to realize his theories in production, the impact of his thought was entirely independent from collage and construction considerations. Some Happenings are the best examples of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty that have yet been produced.
(ed. Sandford 1995:21)

Of course, Artaud was not unique in his influence on performance practice. As for the many possible and partial origins and instigations of European Actionism from the 1960s onwards (especially in Germany, Switzerland and Austria), we would also need to look at the theatrical works of Bertolt Brecht, Frank Wedekind and Oskar Kokoschka, amongst others. In paintings, Egon Schiele's Vienna certainly presents itself to us in the colours of bruises. Each act and actor/ess will have his/her own respective intent and sensibilities. However, approximately three decades after Alfred Jarry's *green-fairied filigree Symbolism*, Artaud's writing was certainly of vast importance, precipitating the avant-garde.

1960s Austria saw the works of a group of artists who became known as the Vienna Actionists; Günter Brus, Otto Muehl, Hermann Nitsch and Rudolf Schwarzkogler were essentially painters, battling – not unlike Artaud and his theatre – with restrictions within and outside of their practice. The four and their collaborators developed theories and praxis in Action Painting, developing into filmed and photographed Material Actions. The work (and inner workings) of these artists differed aesthetically, yet they shared sensibilities and often collaborated. Each attacked Austrian social convention via their own aesthetic, and these Actions took place with or without an audience. Even if the Vienna Actionists had taken no direct and explicit influence from Artaud in theatrical terms, it remains that their notion of 'direct art' is comparable with Artaud's notion of 'direct effectiveness'. In addition, Artaud's notion of a 'total theatre' compares somewhat to the Actionists notion of 'total painting.'

DIRECT ART (also known as Viennese Actionism). A group of Austrian artists […] called themselves at one point the "Vienna Institute for Direct Art". At first these artists produced violent action paintings and crude assemblages but they became dissatisfied with the secondary nature of painting and sculpture: they sought a form of expression that was more immediate and direct. During the early 1960s they organized a series of "actions" similar to the "happenings" of New York that became notorious because of their brutal, sadomasochistic content involving nakedness, blood and the destruction of animal corpses. The movement was also known as "Wiener Aktionismus", the central idea of which was "material action", i.e. the insistence that rituals and ceremonies must be real – direct, literal events – not pretended events as in conventional drama. Nitsch's events took place under rubric of "Orgy Mystery Theatre" (O-M Theatre). The Italian critic Lea Vergine called their work "irritant" because it functioned as social irritant.
(Walker 1992:214) (7)

In the 1974 introductory essay to her (essentially photographic) book *Body Art and Performance*, Lea Vergine portrays a notion of modern performance art thus: "the over-riding desire is to […] grasp the *existent* in all of its brutal physicality, to communicate something that has been previously felt but that is lived in the very moment of communication, to return to the origins without leaving the present, to lead the individual relationship with both himself and others." (Vergine 2000:8). She also includes the Vienna Actionists in her assemblage of "artists who work with their bodies but who cannot be reduced to the label of Body Art since their primary interests are fundamentally cognitive […] The story behind all this is a very old one, and even if one wants to limit oneself to references that fall within this century, the very least one must talk about is German Expressionism, Dadaism, Surrealism, and Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty." (Vergine 2000:12)

In the fine book *Atlas Arkhive Documents of the Avant-Garde Number* 7, Jorg Drews places *Breaking Test* - a solo Action by Günter Brus - in the context of theatre when he writes: "It seems to me that Brus does not convey a content, but triggers painful, beautiful experiences that affect one directly. Although his actions are calculated – he works on the anxiety of the spectators who, as in "normal" theatre, identify with the performer – he no longer sublimates theatre to theatricality. He does not stab an opponent histrionically with a rubber dagger, instead he cuts himself with a razor blade." (ed. Green 1999:74)

The realms of Actionism would appear to exist somewhere between performance art, ritual, theatre and investigations into realms and reclamations of abjectivity. Drew Daniel's article "Aktion Time Vision" considers the work of Rudolf Eb.er (alongside Swiss Joke Lanz, aka Sudden Infant, joint founder of the experimental radio broadcast Psychic Rally in 1989) and Swiss/English Dave Phillips (sometime-collaborator of Eb.er's and ex-Fear of God) in a context with the Vienna Actionists. Of the 1960s Actionists, the following observation is offered:

As a response to postwar modernity, the Aktionists sutured together historical traumas like the holocaust with the developmental traumas inflicted during the 'socialization' of children by the repression of their basic drives and instincts. They saw the rational scientific society, which had created both the death camps and the family unit, which conditions the individual to repress his or her drives in order to produce a good clean citizen, as mutually reinforcing disciplinary structures which must be radically subverted.
(Daniel 2003:24)

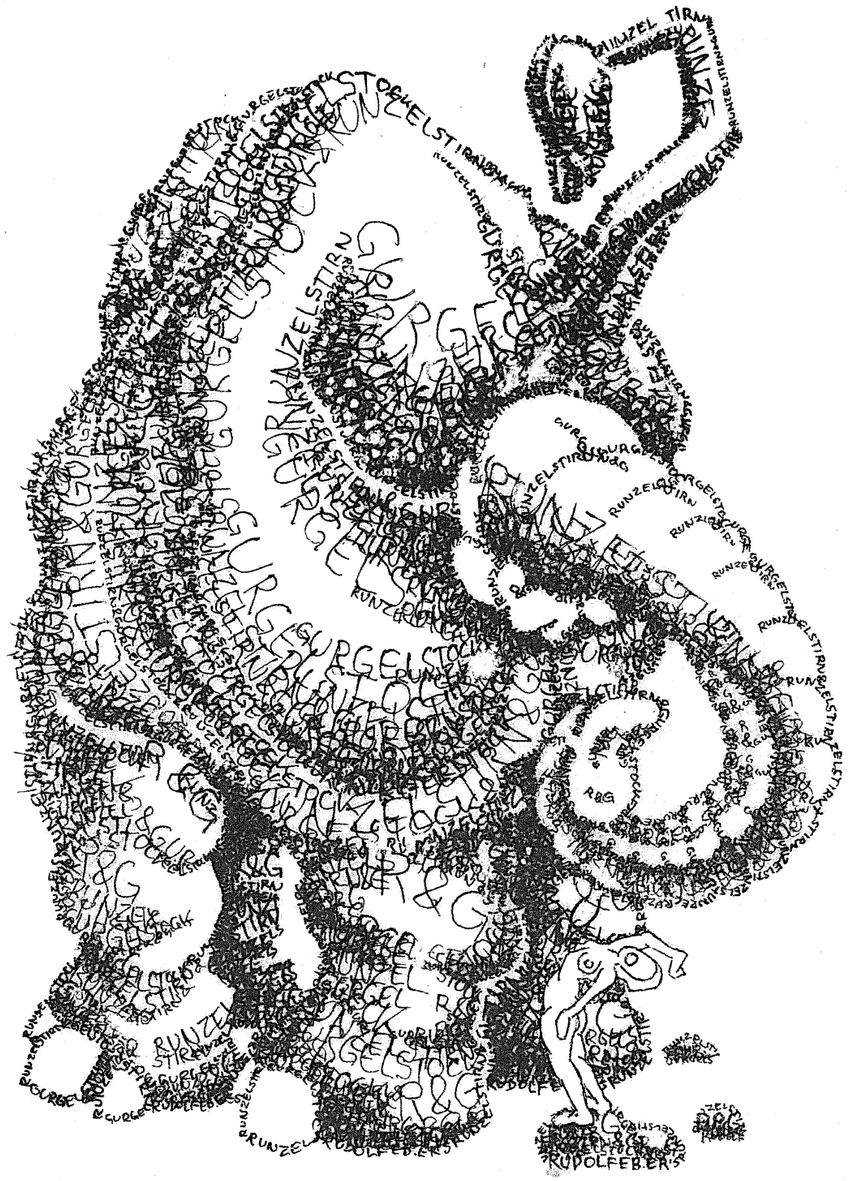
RUDOLF EB.ER / RUNZELSTIRN & GURGELSTOCK

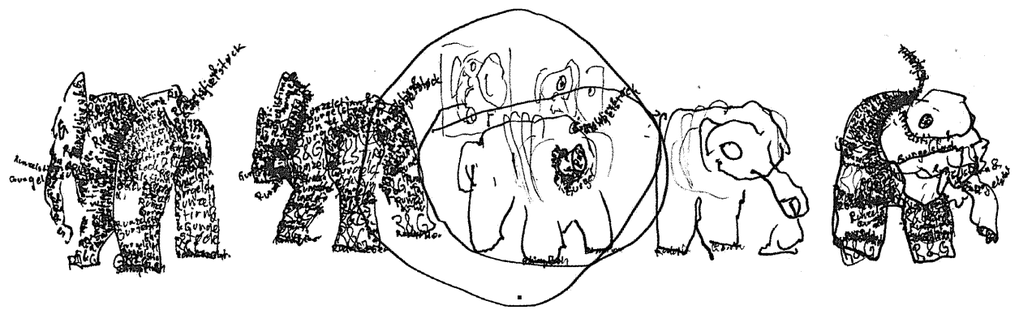
No one has taken the Viennese Aktionist tradition as a musical blueprint further than Rudolf Eb.er and the Swiss Schimpfluch ("abuse") (8) artists (…) Particularly when you consider the themes of Eb.er's work: domestic violence, (9) the re-enactment of foundational experiences of trauma, and purposeful regressions to experiences of sheer pain. In his other identity as Runzelstirn & Gurgelstock, Eb.er performs concerts that seek violent resistance from audience members by combining improvised immediacy, extreme taboo-breaking behaviour and self-conscious theatrics. Audio documents of these events are marked by jarring voice punctuations, gasped breathing and extended tense silences. In terms of his compositional work, Eb.er's editing technique is unique in its deeply precise dissection of both his recordings (sic). Using traditional analogue methods of editing – reel to reel tape with scissors and scalpels – the collages which Eb.er creates using this material are compared by him to biologically dividing and growing his own sounds. Given the visceral nature of his recorded output, and the extremely physical nature of his performances, the notion of growing musical cells, in Eb.er's case, is entirely appropriate.
(Toop & Humon: 2003) (10)

Neither Humour, Poetry or Imagination mean anything unless they re examine man organically through anarchic destruction, his ideas on reality and his poetic position in reality.
(Artaud 1993:71)

The absolute mind is also absolutely carnal.
(Sontag 1976:xxiv)

A Swiss-born Austrian, Rudolf (Heimo) Eb.er is an extremely prolific (11)**, complex and provocative artist working in transgressive areas of abjection and abreaction through painting, photography, solo/collaborative performance, film, installation and sonic composition. In the audio field, he often works with bruitism and regularly uses the voice, human or other (such as 2004's "[You're My] Dogs Doll" on the Appliance Japan label). In the 1980s he experimented with ideas such as the amplification of animal corpses with contact microphones (1985's "Concert For Window and Animal Corpses"), and the amplification of human fingers and plants through the adaptation of needles and a homemade ring modulator ("Concert For two Nerve Systems," 1988). December 1986 saw the foundation of the Schimpfluch audio-publishing house and**





record productions. Since that time he has made innumerable recordings, Actions, performances and co-productions with artists worldwide. A highly adept technical artist in corporate design and chirurgical fields, Eb.er translates and re-routes these precision skills into a cut-up technique for audiotape. Within these guttural and perspicaciously brutal sound assemblages, there is movement and balanced teetering structure throughout. The nature of the sounds is hard-hitting in many respects - his innovative and animalistic musicality can be read as a direct (yet unintentional) translation of the sonic elements suggested by Artaud:

(Musical instruments) need to act deeply and directly on our sensibility through the senses, and from the point of view of sound they invite research into utterly unusual sound properties and vibrations which present-day musical instruments do not possess, urging us to use ancient or forgotten instruments or to invent new ones. Apart from music, research is also needed into instruments and appliances based on special refining and new alloys which can reach a new scale in the octave and produce and unbearably piercing sound or noise.
(Artaud 1993:73)

Although Eb.er's works clearly stem from a multitude of influences, refractions and reflections of Artaud's ideas for the Theatre of Cruelty can be located *within* these works. An example of this could be that the breathing techniques and instructions for the use of voice, alluded to by Artaud, are paralleled in Eb.er's sonic palette of utterance and control. Attained through years of martial arts training, Eb.er's breathing techniques undoubtedly contribute to the effectiveness of actions performed and ultimately produce strong effect on both 'actor' and 'audience.' Combined with the often-abreactional content and therefore purgative (and possibly shamanic) nature of his work, the potential for arcane communication is substantial.

The respective and various political drives of Artaud and Eb.er are not set on entirely similar ground, although they may share the same ultimate disappointment in general popular culture. This same disappointment evidently forms a large part of their respective drives toward complex and multi-disciplined expressions. On balance, Eb.er's dramatic manifestations could be read as emerging from more of a nihilistic, sadist, masochistic (12) **and mischievous nature than the possible metaphysical salvation and altruistic intent implied through Artaud's proposals. Eb.er's logic and aesthetic is raw and scatological but the intention towards the audience is not entirely murderous: "I call my actions psycho-physical tests and trainings. This is what they are. The audience is provoked to reaction (which might be the training) whereas this reaction is not to my know (a test). For my own as for the audience."** (13) **In this quote, he refers to the fact that the reaction of both performer and onlooker is indeterminate. He is saying that these tests and trainings (which would include any abreaction to performance content) are applicable to actor and audience likewise, indicating a tangible sense of preparation, control and responsibility.**

Indeed, for the purposes of understanding something of the diligence that Artaud mentions in his revision of the word 'cruelty,' we could look towards the intimations in Eb.er's work overall. Eb.er's works and Artaud's proposals for the Theatre of Cruelty harness the energy that arises from calculated confrontational performance. Encountering Eb.er's work, an associational shock of some sort inevitably bolts through our synapses - and this is an imperative to its physiological success. For the Action "Erbrechspiel für drei Mädchen" (Kobe, Japan 2003), Eb.er utilized elements from the following instructional score devised and developed by Rudolf Schwarzkogler between 1966-68:

A MUSICAL COMEDY FOR TELEVISION (COLOUR TELEVISION)

4 members of the philharmonia (string quartet) sit in a conservatory and play the string quartet in G-minor by Arnold Schonberg or some other suitable string quartet

A young girl with bleached white hair and wearing a white dress, white stockings and shoes drinks down a glass of white liquid during the first movement

During the second movement, she drinks down a glass of bright liquid

During the third movement, she drinks down a glass of dark violet liquid

During the fourth movement, she kneels down on the floor and vomits into a bowl with the aid of a chicken feather
(ed. Green 1999:219)

This Aktion was left unperformed in Schwarzkogler's brief lifetime, and has been appropriated by Eb.er into his 'Vomit Play' Actions; these have morphed and changed with performance. (14) **In the Action "Erbrechspiel für drei Mädchen," three women dressed in white systematically drink coloured liquids to Eb.er's pre recorded brutal staccato soundtrack (under the shouted, military-esque instruction of Eb.er), and then induce themselves to vomit into bowls at their feet on the stage *in silence*. A reinvention of Schwarzkogler's unperformed piece, this Action definitely subscribes to the notion of invading the audience's space, utilizing bodily sense and reaction. Although the action takes place on a stage, and the players do not physically move from their initial positions, the durational sight, sound and smell of the women repeatedly vomiting (and continually inducing themselves to do so) and the silence surrounding them is indeed bound to provoke a definite, yet undefined bodily reaction in the spectator. Slightly more extreme Actions executed by Eb.er and his collaborators such as "Aktion Für Streichquintett und Arschtrompete" (Tokyo 1997), and "Konzert For Piano and Shotgun" (San Francisco 1998) are likely to induce more intense reactions.** (15) **In the Tokyo show, a female collaborator has a tube inserted into her anus while a string quintet plays. The creation of the Asstrumpet is such that the (consenting) woman screams and wails to the sounds of a classical set-up:**

Credited as an 'actress,' it remains unclear whether Yakushinji is genuinely suffering, simulating great suffering, or an unsettling combination of the two.... [her] 'acting' starts with kitsch horror and somehow slides ever inwards, registering the effect of 'psycho-physical tests and training' as a regression to an entirely primal level of existence as pain. Eb.er, meanwhile, subjects her to an onslaught of violently distorted screams of abuse: "DO YOU THINK THIS IS A JOKE / THIS IS NO FUCKING JOKE! I DON'T CARE ANY MORE!"
(Daniel 2003:22) (16)

These Actions are severe, and close in prescription to Artaud's notions of cruelty and diligence: "Practicing cruelty involves a higher determination to which the executioner-tormentor is also subject and which he must be RESOLVED to endure when the time comes. Above all, cruelty is very lucid, a kind of strict control and submission to necessity." **(Artaud 1993:80)**

In contrast to the notion of cruelty, the directly humorous, absurd and pseudo-masturbatory Action *Furzkonzert* would seem in accordance with Artaud's instruction for "explosive interjections of poetry and humour, whose task is to disorganise and pulverise appearances" **(Artaud 1993:84). Important and integral to a great deal of Eb.er's work is a certain humour woven into its fabric – or indeed at its very core; of this transgressive (and possibly atavistic) humour, Eb.er writes,** "the Viennese Actionists in fact did mention too that their works grew out of being Austrian. I guess it's the morbid affair Austrians have with humour. That is not exactly a British black humour – more an excremental brown one." **(Eb.er 2005)**

AKTION FÜR HAHN AND KRÜPPEL

Every show will contain physical, objective elements perceptible to all. Shouts, groans, apparitions, surprise, dramatic moments of all kinds [...] Direct contact will be established between the audience and the show, between actors and audience.
(Artaud 1993:72-74)

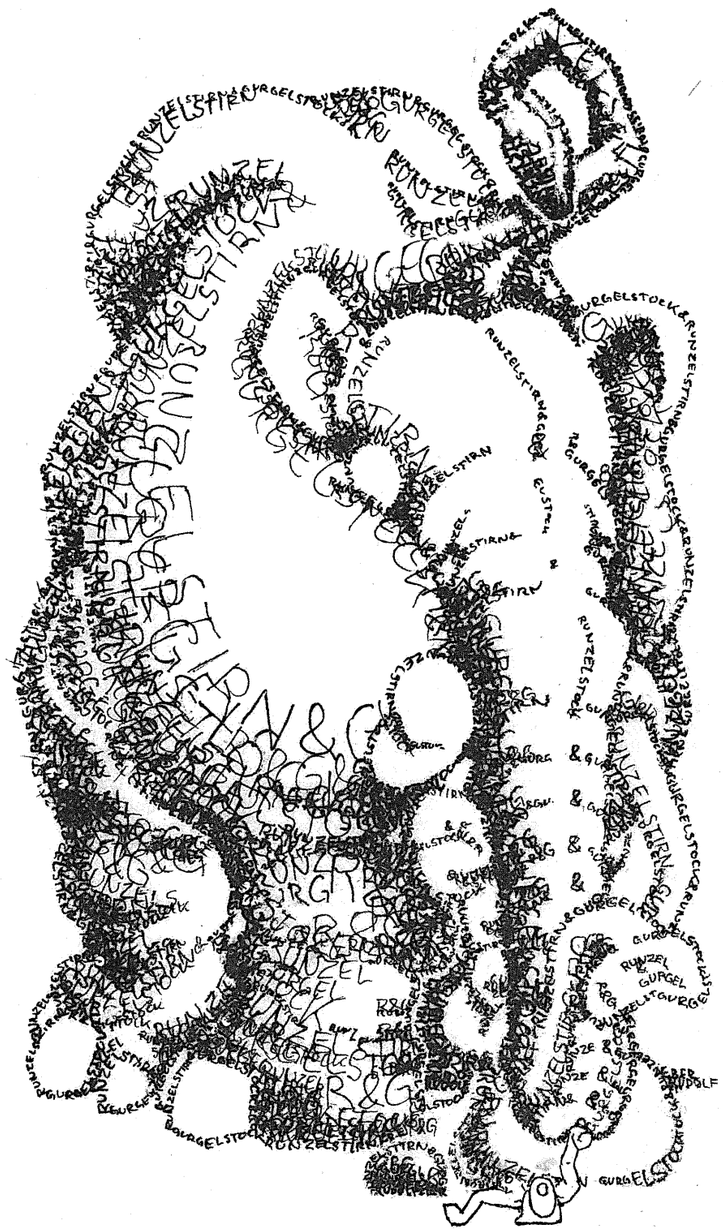
The following text is my own detailed eyewitness account of an Action executed by R&G at Club Bears in Osaka, Japan. Bears is a well renowned cubbyhole Noise venue, accessed from the street via the descent of a stairwell into a basement. There is a stage area at the far end of the room, and the stage stands about half a meter high from the floor. "Aktion für Hahn and Krüppel" was an inclusion in the annual Noise Mayday event programme (2003). This description and a note on my personal physical reaction to the performance have been included in order to illustrate an example of performance and kinaesthetic/physiological response.

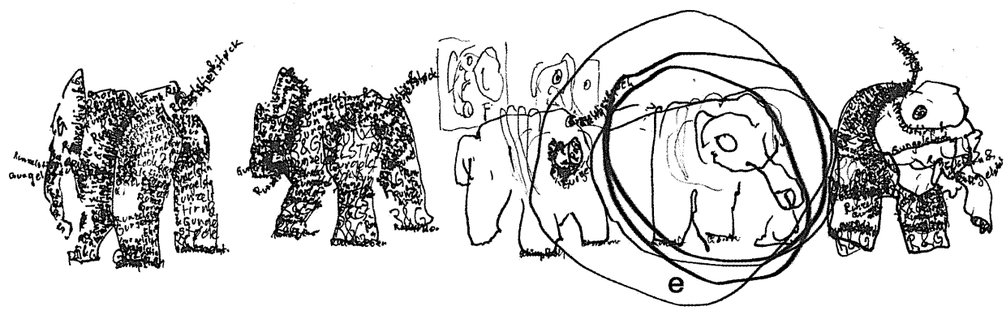
* * *

A small woman wearing a long straggly black wig enters stage left, shrouded in silence and expectation. She shuffles forward, carrying a rusty cooking pot or bowl, and sets it down on the stage. She also holds a long ladle or stirring implement. The woman is wearing/using a customised prosthetic leg; this leg appears unclean and is wrapped in tattered bandages. She kneels and positions the false leg outstretched at a right angle to her body, amplifying the perceived distortion of her posture and unusual limb. Within the Noise music (sound-based) context of the evening, we can immediately discern that this is to be something a little *else*, we have a perfect setting. (17)

Eb.er enters stage left, dressed only in a skirt-like sack or sarong. The naked state of his top half reveals scratches on his chest. Eb.er is holding a bold and inquisitive looking white cockerel. The cockerel is alive and alert, and has a small black collar round his neck. Conspicuous lengthy black audio wires are attached to the animal, but at this point it is unclear where the wires are going to or coming from because the animal is in constant motion. The audience registers this mise en scene and punctuates the silence with nervous giggles. The silence weighs heavy in the air after the 'regular Noise music.'

The woman strikes the bowl hard with the spoon at irregular intervals. Eb.er holds the cockerel in his arms, occasionally prompting the animal to fly and flutter into the audience, most of who are seated on the floor or standing against the walls of the venue. Eb.er then moves amongst the spectators, stepping over and around people, to retrieve the cockerel and return to the stage area. He repeats. Through the main speakers, we hear the sound of the cockerel's crow. The animal's voice has been manipulated so as to be particularly distorted and abrasive. The woman, unmoving from her initial position on the stage, slowly increases the speed and intensity with which she strikes the pot. Each time Eb.er scoops up the cockerel from within the audience, he embraces it affectionately and rubs his face in its feathers, a gesture seeming somewhere between





lustiness and hunger. Occasionally, he wrestles with the animal in an attempt to settle it down, whereupon it again becomes placid and sits comfortably in his arms. It comes across that this is a relatively tame cockerel, one quite used to being handled, but it also appears that the scratches on Eb.er's chest may have originated from this animal in one of their 'wrestles.'

A new sound emanates from the speakers, and I realize that the cockerel has a small microphone attached to the collar around his neck. Again, I hear the distorted crowing and deduce that it has been pre-recorded, as it does not correlate with the animal's actions. The new sounds I hear are those of Eb.er's own voice as he mumbles murmurs and growls into the cockerel's body. The microphone attached to the cockerel's neck collar amplifies Eb.er's voice through the body of the animal, using its density as the sound conductor. The pace intensifies, the bowl banging and the growling and the flapping and the nervous energy and the giggling, until the banging ceases and Eb.er is bellowing through the body of the cockerel. The cockerel remains remarkably undisturbed. The action ends.

* * *

Within moments of the start of "Aktion Für Hahn und Krüppel," my body went into an unexpected state of shock. This began as soon as I saw the cockerel, maybe because I assumed that the animal was sure to perish in a gruesome manner in this bizarre situation, for some kind of crass and meretricious thrill or Nitsch-esque blood orgy. Although I had no prior experience of Eb.er's work, this was my presumption and expectation. I remained seated on the floor of the venue near the stage area, and the manner in which my shock became manifest was such that my whole body began to shake steadily, almost violently. I could neither stop nor temper this direct reaction to the events – or the perceived events – happening around me. The main body of outward audience response to the Action throughout, as I was aware, ranged between edgy laughter and silence, tension and a kind of nervous hilarity, thus positively in concordance with Artaud's inference of "the action's direct, immediate hold on the spectators." **(Artaud 1993:75)**

Eb.er incorporates animals into his works in a way that the Actionists in Vienna may not have done – by introducing the nervous energy of the animal ('Aktion Für 3 Ziegenböcke / For 3 Goats' in Taipei, Taiwan 1998). He has appropriated the corpses of animals within his work ('Concert For Window and Animal Corpses' – Switzerland 1985; 'Idyll' – a corpse installation in the Swiss mountains in 1991; 'Aktion For Guts' – San Francisco 1998) but slaughter has not been a subject. (18) **In any case, the *liveness* (I use this word in the spirit of Philip Auslander's book) of the creature adds to the required unpredictability of the Action as a whole - a wild card – securing reaction. As a society harbouring a complex relationship with animals and humans alike (never mind corpses, faeces and flagellation), Eb.er insists that we engage with the content and context that he presents to us. His uncomfortable and unquestionably effective blend of (sur-)realisms simultaneously hold polar positions in relation to Artaud's notions and intent. To apply Artaudian articulation to these works is almost to compare a seed to its latest incarnation in full, or maybe more aptly, rotting bloom. These works are alive and vital, showing what is there in all of its ostensibly hideous and valid truth.** (19) **As for the blurring of boundaries, some of his Material Actions (photographic self portraits) were labelled as *gewaltpornographie* by the German police in 2004 (*KotSchleuder* vol. 1-3 forewarns that its "content must NOT be shown [...] in public or to easily consternated persons.")** (20)

It could be argued that Eb.er's work relies upon reactions relating to 'disgust' to ensure effect, but surely these are effective means. The Theatre of Cruelty is concerned with direct effectiveness and it defines that with pure theory; a shaking up and shocking of the audience, "there must be no let-up, no vacuum in the audience's mind or sensitivity. That is to say there will be no distinct divisions between life and theatre." **(Artaud 1993:84) A playing-out of Actions and/or Direct Art will ensure, through the crossing of social boundaries, reaction or abreaction. The gap between 'life and theatre' here is indistinct, i.e. the use of bodies (alive, dead and false) and the investigations into the realms of socio-politico restriction.**

Eb.er's psychophysical tests and trainings ensure direct effectiveness through their difficult content and their careful, cartoon-esque timing. Here, the aforementioned 'gap' is further distorted especially considering works such as 'Aktion Für Streichquintett und Arschtrompete', and 'Konzert For Piano and Shotgun' in which, after "(sitting) at a piano and playing stark dissonant chords while sobbing his own name (...) Eb.er produced a very real-looking shotgun, cocked it and pointed it at the crowd. Reactions varied from tense giggles to white knuckle panic; some people scrambled out of the line of fire while others just froze. The shotgun went off at eardrum-shattering volume. Flooded with adrenaline as our 'fight or flight' systems kicked in, by the time the audience had settled into nervous laughter and some kind of assurance that the gun had fired a blank, Eb.er sat back down at the keys and carried on with his barrelhouse Russian Roulette. The knowledge that the last cartridge was a blank didn't matter a whit to the central nervous system, and I left the club, *shaken and re-energised*, yet more baffled and hooked than ever.' (Daniel 2003:21) (21)

Eb.er's work could relate to Artaudian principle almost atavistically, showing traits of a lineage that he neither knows nor particularly cares about. Having said that, let us not be too hasty with judgments upon his perceived 'ethics'; this work can create many questions. He says of the aforementioned piece, "the shotgun was damn real. But I never pointed at the crowd. I pointed always over their heads. Pointing at the crowd - that would be too simple. And stupid. Some did hide and piss... without getting pointed at. That's my point." **(Eb.er 2008)**

> Artaud's notion of truth stipulates an exact and delicate concordance between the mind's "animal" impulses and the highest operations of the intellect.
> **(Sontag 1976:xxiii)**

Notes:

(1) Eb.er reveals that for an accurate quote we must replace the word 'joke' with the word 'show.'

(2) To differentiate between the motor (mundane) meaning of the word 'action,' and (an) 'Action' that is specific in its existence as a particular breed of performance work, I have used capitalization where appropriate. The Germanic spelling 'aktion' is also widely associated with this form of work, and the choice of spelling differs between individuals.

(3) A brief and condensed example of this tangible 'danger' might be Artaud's production of Roger Vitrac's play 'Les Mysteres de L'amour' where a 'gunshot' is fired into the audience on the pretence of wounding or killing an 'audience member' (Goldberg 1979:96).

(4) For an investigation into Japanese Surrealism, see Sas 2001 and hear 1960s Japanese tape scape in the 'Obscure Tape Music of Japan' series. Conversely, consider the visual artist Trevor Brown. Although their respective works are not directly linked, Eb.er and Brown are both 'outsiders' in that their works may use 'difficult' or 'thorny' subject matter, and also that they are both gaijin who have made a home in Japan.

(5) This essay utilizes various letters, emails and conversations between Rudolf and the author during the period of 2003-08.

(6) It transpires that Eb.er was not aware of the Viennese Actions until after he had instigated his own performances in the 1980s.

(7) This quote comes from the 1992 'Glossary of Art, Architecture and Design since 1945' cited by Eugene Gorny in an essay about Hermann Nitsch.

(8) 'Abuse' is not an entirely accurate translation of 'schimpfluch.' It is wordplay, combining 'abusing' with 'curse' ('schimpfen' and 'fluch').

(9) Toop and Humon have chosen this semiotically misleading phrase in their text, one that is important to redefine. Eb.er says, "In certain times I isolated myself and beat up my own meat (for recording purposes). I recorded real domestic violence in the neighbourhood, but this is just a small part of my sound archives. I use sadomasochistic activities or hysterical attacks recorded at home, but 'domestic violence' [portrays the] wrong image." Understandably, Eb.er does not want to be misrepresented as a wife-beating drunk, stating that kind of behaviour as 'explosive' whereas his exploits are 'implosive.'

(10) This text appears on the web page listed in the bibliography. It concerns the 2003 Prix Ars Electronica festival held in Austria.

(11) See http://www.discogs.com/artist/Rudolf+Eb.er

(12) Deleuze's essay "Coldness and Cruelty" pries apart Freud's 'sadomasochistic entity' and summarizes it in eleven points on page 134. These summations would appear to bear significant relevance to Eb.er's entire artistic output.

(13) I have altered Eb.er's English minimally because I feel he often portrays a point with more expression than when that point is overworked in English.

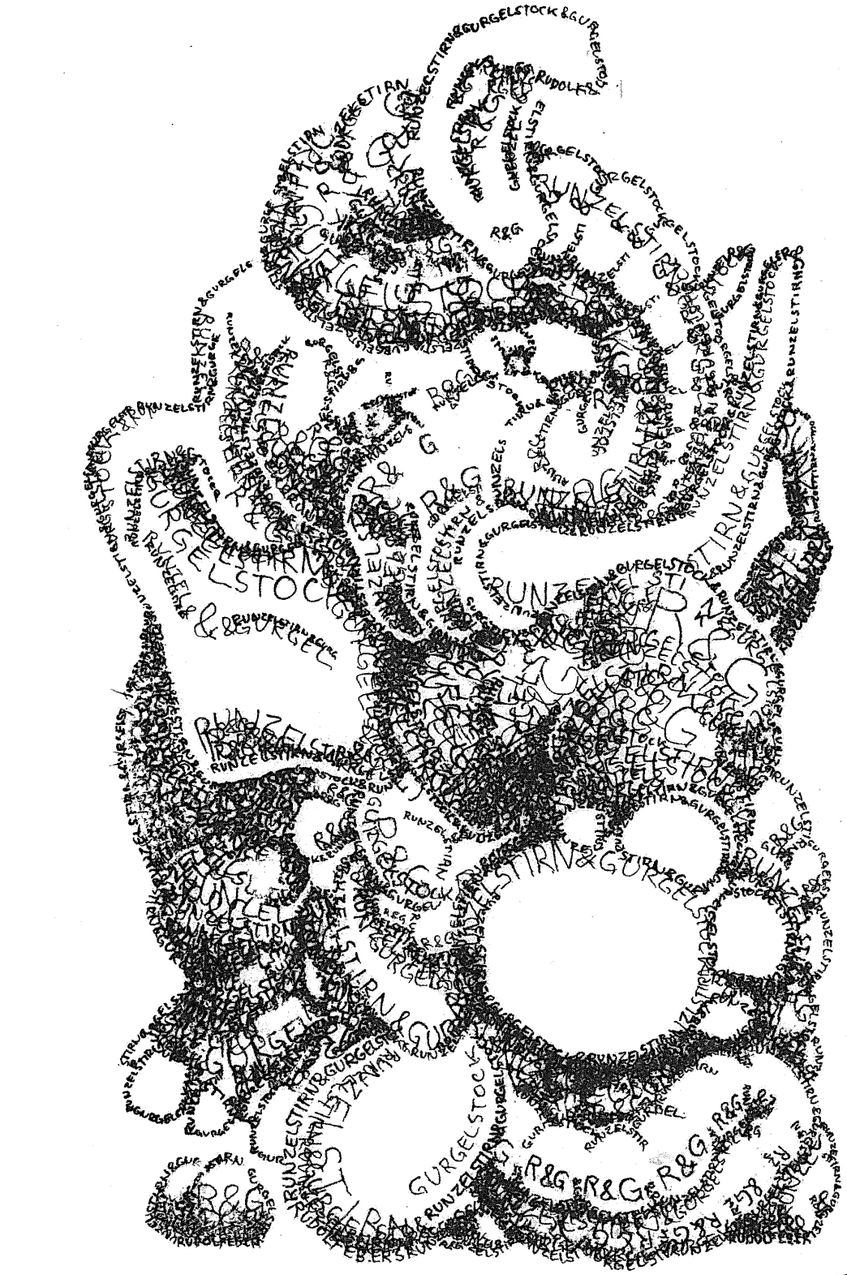
(14) Eb.er was not aware of Schwarzkogler's piece when he began his own, and adapted the piece into his thereafter.

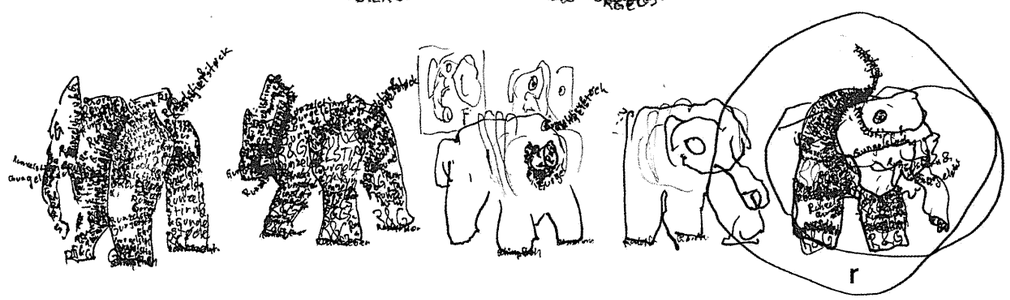
(15) Many of Eb.er's collaborators are female, and he refers to them as actresses, alluding to a theatrical paradigm. On occasion his works have been accused of misogyny — an accusation Eb.er refutes — positing 'extreme experience' as a positive incident for the collaborators. This notion concurs with the abreactive element to many of these works. A current collaborator (endurer?) is the Osaka-based artist, Mai Sau.

(16) See note 1.

(17) Eb.er's calculated use of silence in his recordings (and live work) is intrinsic to structural and effective concerns. This is presented very well in the following quote from Daniel, and is concordant with Artaud's "spatial areas furnished with silence and stillness."
(Artaud 1993:66)

R&G records are notable for "extended canyons of silence strategically positioned throughout. (...) the silence in Schimpfluch recordings is tense with Pinter-like dread. It is the calculating silence of a cornered animal which has sensed a weakness and is about to lunge."
(Daniel 2003:24)





(18) Dave Phillips, a contemporary and collaborator of Eb.er's, has specifically used corporate slaughterhouse film footage within some of his work.

(19) In this respect, much of Eb.er's works tessellate with Deleuze's notion of the 'perverse literary mirrors' held to society by both Sade and Masoch (see Masochism 37-8).

(20) A couple of images in KotSchleuder vol. 1 could be read as alluding to the fabled method of Schwarzkogler's untimely death.

(21) My italics, to emphasise the physicality and physiology encountered.

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Joji Yuasa AOI-no-UE Obscure Tape Music of Japan vol.1 (OMEGA POINT Archive Series OPA 001) CD

Private Recording of 'Aktion für Streichquintett und Arschtrompete' (Tokyo, 12th June 1997)

Hate™ Operation KotSchleuder vol. 1-3 (Tochnit Aleph/ Schimpfluch Commune Int) - limited edition prints & CD.

Aktionen / Exhibitions (1985-2007):

1985
Teleaktionist - Zürich, Switzerland
Concert "For Window and Animal Corpses" - Bern

1987
Motori(k/sch) - Spittal a. d. D.,
Austria Non-public Actions - Switzerland / Austria

1988
Concert "For two Nerve Systems" - Zürich Reaktion-straining (Aktiv/Passiv) - Zürich
Bacch.Anal - Reykjavik, Iceland
...mit Kopf nach unten (Pferdeskalp? Oh Shit /Mmm) - Reykjavik

1989
Abreaktionsspiel - Zürich
Selbstdarstellungsserie - Zürich
Schwein-genanntes Unter-ich (Der Eb.er in Dir) - Spittal a.d.D.
(Klin.) Schreitherapie - Zürich
Aktionsjodlerei - Olthal, Switzerland
Strassenaktion (Series) - Zürich
Psychic Rally Radio Actions (monthly for following 7 years) - Zürich

1990
Erbrechspiel (Vomitplay) - Zürich
Konsequenz-Training (für eine Testperson) - Zürich
...Besudelung (/Notdürftig?) - Zürich
Hühnchen-Zerdresch-(A)aktion - Zürich
Enthemmungsaktion - Zürich
900323 - Aktion - Zürich
Aktion "Extremhumoroid (Burgenholzer Revue)" - Zürich
901130 - Noisektion - Bern, Switzerland
Aktionen zu Eberdorf (Series)

1991
910512 - Mama 1 (Reinigungsaktion) - Zürich
911130 - SN (Essen/Eating) (kunstszene '91 Festival) - Zürich
Shit-Installation (kunstszene '91 Festival) - Zürich
Corpses-Installation "Idyll"
(Installed on swiss mountains)
Contribution at "Manifestation for the unstable Media" Festival - Amsterdam, Netherlands

1992
920510 - Mama 2 (Materialaktion) - Kölliken
920510 - "Aktion mit Bullterrier" - Kölliken
Geräuschaktion ("Twist Your Brain") - Zürich
"The Haters" - Zürich
"Bracul" - Aktion / Installation (In absence of Rudolf Eb.er) - Frankfurt, Germany

1993
Contribution at "AVE '93" Festival - Arnhem, Netherlands
Geräuschaktion (Pornographic Festival) - Zürich
930205 - A-Aktion (Zerstörungs Strukturen Festival) - Solothurn, Switzerland
Konzert 930227 (w/ Joke Lanz, Céleste Urech) - Kölliken
930509 - Mama 3 (13 Becken) - Zürich
Demolition of a Building, No.1 - Zürich
Exhibition (Naturbilder?) - Zürich
931228 - Birthday (In absence of Rudolf Eb.er) - Los Angeles, USA

1994
Tele-Contribution at "End-Art" Festival - Rüsselsheim
(Part of) labor 8 (Lecture, Performance, Exhibition) - Zürich
Exhibition (Part of Game Grrrl / Gen-Tech) - Zürich
(Part of) labor 9 (Situation) - Stuttgart, Germany
Aktion "For two Lovers and Pigbrain" - Zürich

1995
950826 - Akction
("Powwow" international Symposium) - Zürich
950901 - (Con-Dom, C.C.C.C., Schimpfluch-Gruppe) - Ilan, Taiwan
950908 - Aktion (Taipei Broken Life Festival) - Taipei, Taiwan
Demolition of a Building, No.2 - Taipei
Exhibition at Taipei County Culture Center
951223 - Aktion "For three Chairs" (Lichtzwang)
- Baden, Switzerland

1996
960202 - Aktion (Schimpfluch-Gruppe / Nan Quan Collaboration) - Taipei
960203 - Aktion (Schimpfluch-Gruppe / Nan Quan Collaboration) - Taipei
960204 - Erbrechspiel (Vomitplay) und Aktionistisches Konzert - Tainan, Taiwan
Mist (Dung) Installationen at "Hetzjagd" Festival- Bern
960331 "Triebjagd" Hospitalization - Bern
960812 - "Zecken" Konzert (Masami Akita w/ Runzelstirn & Gurgelstock) - Tokyo, Japan
960817 - Pzyckzchi Aktion - Tokyo
960829 - Pzyckzchi Aktion - Taipei
960830 - Aktion - Taipei
Aktion 961109 - Leeds, England
Aktion 961112 - Nottingham, England
Aktion 961114 - Newcastle, England
Aktion 961115 - Bradford, England
Aktion 961116 - London, England
Aktion 961123 - Paris, France
Konzert "For two Snails and Pap" - Zürich

1997
Aktionistic Concert 970223 - Paris
Exhibition at "Ear as Eye" - Los Angeles, USA
Exhibition - Aarau, Switzerland
Exhibition at "Ear as Eye" - Seattle, USA
Exhibition at the Art-University of Zürich
Exhibition at "B&H" - Zürich
2 Actions 970921 - Tokyo
2 Actions 970923 - Gunma, Japan
2 Actions 970924 - Nagoya, Japan
3 Actions 970927 (One in Collaboration w/ "Masonna") - Osaka, Japan
2 Actions 971001 - Osaka
Aktion 971008 - Okayama, Japan
2 Actions 971009 - Tokyo
Vomitplay and Action 971010 - Tokyo
Aktion 971010 - Matsuyama, Japan
Aktion 971111 (as "Eb.ersonna" Collaboration w/ "Masonna") - Tokyo
Aktion 971128 - Nagoya
Aktion "Für Streichquintett und Arschtrompete" 971206 - Tokyo

1998
Aktion "For Staplegun and Tapes" 980214 - San Francisco, USA
Aktion "For Guts" 980221 - San Francisco
Konzert "For Piano and Shotgun" - San Francisco
Installation "For 10 Human Heads", Exhibition - Tokyo
Aktion "Für Mädchenhals und Säge" - Tokyo
Aktion 980626 (w/ Andy Bolus) "There's a Hole" - Tokyo
Aktion "Für 3 Ziegenböcke / For 3 Goats" - Taipei

1999
Konzert (w/ Masami Akita, Kouhei Matsunaga, "Masonna") - Osaka
Aktion 990324"For disarranged Leg/Arm Prosthesis" (w/ "Masonna") - Tokyo
Aktion 991128 - Osaka

2000
Acting / Narration for Movie "w/o", directed by Kohki Hassai - Tokyo
Antiaktion 000311 - Tokyo

2001
Aktion "Für 2 Meter Phallus" 011001 - Osaka

2002
Audio-Aktion für WDR - Germany
Aktion "Erbrechspiel für ein Mädchen" 020526 - Osaka
Aktion "Erbrechspiel mit Schreichor" 020531 - Osaka
Aktion "Erbrechspiel mit Schreichor" 020602 - Kyoto

2003
Audio-Aktion für "Ars Electronica" - Linz, Austria

Aktion "Für Hahn und Krüppel" 030518 - Osaka
Aktion "Erbrechspiel für drei Mädchen" 030718 - Kobe, Japan
Symposium Teilnahme "Crashcourse / Meine.bank" - Berlin, Germany
Movie-Aktion - San Francisco

2004

DJ-666° 040306 - Osaka
Furzkonzert 040425 - Osaka
Furzkonzert 040529 - Osaka
Furzkonzert 040613 - Kobe
Furzkonzert 040617 - Paris
Konzert 040617 (w/ John Duncan, Zbignev Karkowski, Kouhei Matsunaga) - Paris
Furzkonzert 040618 - St. Etienne, France
Furzkonzert 040621 - Geneva, Switzerland
Furzkonzert 040623 - Zürich
Furzkonzert 040626 - Berlin
Aktion "Für Dirndl und Müesli" 040626 - Berlin

2005

Exhibition (w/ Yamatsuka Eye, Andy Bolus) - Osaka
Aktion "Für 2 Meter Phallus" 050304 - Kobe
Lecture 050305 - Osaka
Transmitted Aktion 050318 - New York, USA
Konzert 050319 (w/ Andy Bolus) - Tokyo
Transmitted Aktion 050321 - Providence, USA
Transmitted Aktion 050322 - Boston, USA
Transmitted Aktion 050323 - Easthampton, USA
Transmitted Aktion 050324 - Kingston, USA
Transmitted Aktion 050325 - Rochester, USA
Transmitted Aktion 050326 - Toronto, Canada
Aktion "Fleischkopf / Meathead" 050529 - Osaka
Aktion "Erbrechspiel für drei Mädchen" ("Sadistic Circus" Festival) 050717 - Tokyo
Aktion "Fleischkopf / Meathead" 050724 - Osaka
Konzert w/ Leif Elggren, Tetsuo Furudate 050731 - Osaka
Solo-Exhibition "Hate-Operation" - Tokyo
Pre-Aktion (one week) für "The Drawing Center" (Exhibition) - New York

2006

DJ-666° 060321 - Osaka
Aktion 060423 - Edinburgh, Scotland
Aktion 060424 - Newcastle, England
Aktion 060425 - Leeds, England
Aktion 060426 - Sheffield, England
Aktion 060427 - Nottingham, England
Aktion 060428 - Bristol, England
Aktion 060501 (plus lecture) - London, England
Radio-Aktion 060503 - RES FM London
Concert "For four Chairs" (Schimpfluch-Gruppe) 060504 - AA-London
Aktion & Exhibition 060513 - Berlin
Aktion 060609 - Osaka
DJ-666° Aktion 060618 - Kobe
Exhibition "Condenced Vanilla" - Tokyo
Konzert for Spanking 060917 - Tokyo
Group-Exhibition "Vomitorium with AgitProp" - Chicago

2007

Konzert for Spanking 070311 - Osaka
Test-Aktion 070616 - Tokyo
Audio-Exhibition "Schlechte Musik" - Breda, Netherlands
Aktion and Filmexpo 070629 - Sydney, Australia
Aktion 070701 - Medlow Bath (Blue Mountains), Australia
Collaborative Impro-Performance (w/Rizili) 070702 - Sydney
Radio-Aktion (Studio-Psycho-Akustik) 070704 - Brisbane, Australia
Aktion 070705 - Brisbane
Aktion 070706 - Hobart, Tasmania
Aktion 070709 - Adelaide, Australia
Shaman-Concert (w/Dave Phillips) and Filmexpo 070710 - Adelaide
Aktion and Filmexpo 070713 - Melbourne, Australia
Lecture 070713 - Melbourne
Auto-Aktion 070714 - Melbourne
Aktion 070716 - Perth, Australia
Radio-Aktion (Radio1) 070720 - Dunedin, New Zealand
Aktion 070720 - Dunedin
Filmexpo 070721 - Oamaru, New Zealand
Aktion 070722 - Christchurch, New Zealand
Konzertante Aktion 070725 - Wanganui, New Zealand
Aktion 070727 - Wellington, New Zealand
Aktion 070728 - Auckland, New Zealand
Aktion 070731 - Sydney
Exhibition and Aktions-Konzert 070811 - Sydney
Radio-Aktion (w/Joke Lanz, Raijo Pami), (Radio Centraal) 070815 - Antwerp, Belgium
Aktion 070815 - Antwerp
Broken-Aktion 070817 - Paris
Gerotsunami-Performance (w/Andy Bolus) 070819 - Paris
Gerotsunami-Performance (w/Andy Bolus) 070826 - Antwerp
Audio-Exhibition "Schlechte Musik" 070921-071014 - Breda, Netherlands

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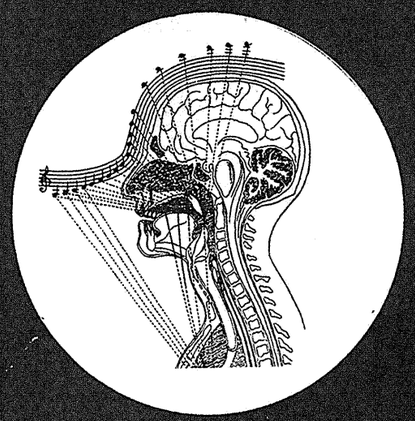

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NO FUN

CARLOS GIFFONI INTERVIEWED
BY STEVE UNDERWOOD
INTRODUCTION BY CHRIS SIENKO

In the Noise lexicon, are there any two more controversial words these days than 'No' and 'Fun'? Other than 'White' and 'Power,' what other two-word utterance will get you a bigger reaction? Everybody knows what it is, and everybody has an opinion on how it's the best/worst thing that ever happened to Noise.

The concept of a multi-day festival of abrasive experimental music was hardly new by 2004. Even excepting the myriad experimental music festivals in Europe and elsewhere, the list of North American multi-day festivals was quite long, including the Nihilist Spasm Band's No Music Festival (London, Ontario Canada, 1998-2003), The Freedom From/De Stijl Festival (Minneapolis, Minnesota 2003-2004), the International Noise Conference (2004 - present), and the Wooden Octopus Skull Pfest (Portland, Oregon 2004-2005), both of which started the same year as the first No Fun Festival.

One of the major distinguishing factors of No Fun was its wide-ranging roster of acts, bringing Sonic Youth vanity projects elbow-to-elbow with scummy, raw Power Electronic and Noise acts like Grunt, Deathpile, and Sutcliffe Jugend. A host of legendary acts played their first U.S. shows at No Fun, including Incapacitants and Pain Jerk in 2007. The festival's abnormally large crowd size and its enthusiasm for hard noise so astounded Joe Roemer that he brought the members of Macronympha back together for two reunion performances in 2005-2006. Year after year, checking the early notice of that year's NFF lineup always brought a surprise or two, be it a rare U.S. appearance from Merzbow, Solmania, or Sudden Infant, or bands and projects not normally known to tour or even leave their home, such as Randy Yau, Humectant Interruption, and Borbetomagus.

The other aspect that separated No Fun from all other noise extravaganzas was the sheer number of acts performing every year. Taking advantage of the split-level spaces he rented, No Fun mastermind Carlos Giffoni organized a split-level program as well, with stages on two levels and acts timed to theoretically start in staggered succession. It may not have synced perfectly every single time, but with a quick trot up and down the stairs every 20 minutes, it was possible to catch as many as 50 acts each year, assuming you kept to the schedule and weren't taking time to chat with old friends or throw some money at the vast expanse of merch tables (a ubiquitous fixture of every festival so far). But not everyone was thrilled. When the first festival was announced in late 2003, praise and jeers rained down in equal measure. While many fanatics bit their lip in anticipation of seeing Wolf Eyes, Pengo, Nautical Almanac, Hair Police, Rubber-O-Cement, To Live and Shave in LA, and others in one location over one three-day weekend, others bristled. Some were irked by the door price, feeling that noise was best served with close friends, an under-$5 cover charge, and complimentary pancakes. Others felt the name No Fun indicated an overt negativity at a time when day-glo and good vibes were becoming the law of the land.
(Ironically, the scales now tip the other way, as NFF is derided not as a bastion of bad vibes, but a place where 'noise hippies' go to get their peace, love, and good vibes, and no place for the likes of dour, humorless, hate-craving noiseniks who crave the 'old school.')

For all the aggravation and the whining, though, No Fun grew and thrived each year, even expanding to a four-day, single-level program in 2007 when The Hook's basement stage was rendered unusable due to repairs. The Hook (located in Brooklyn's isolated Red Hook neighborhood) closed in 2007, and the festival relocated to the Knitting Factory in 2008 before coming full circle in 2009, back to the location that hosted the first event back in 2004, the venue formerly known as North 6, now re-dubbed the Music Hall of Williamsburg. Along the way, Giffoni launched the No Fun Productions label, dedicated, as is the fest, to showcasing some of his favorite acts and, in many cases, presenting durable artifacts from past festivals, including live sets from Merzbow, Enema Syringe, Aaron Dilloway, and Giffoni himself.

Last year, Giffoni expanded yet again, hosting a second three-day festival in 2009, based not in New York, but in Sweden. Many of the No Fun regulars from the States, including Emeralds, Burning Star Core, Hair Police, Wolf Eyes, and Religious Knives shared the stage alongside Swedish acts like Sewer Election, Sons of God, and Enema Syringe. Of course, the gripe parade marches on, with some arguing that Giffoni did not emphasize enough of Sweden's natural treasures in selecting the three-day lineup, preferring instead to import his American comrades to foreign soil. It all just goes to show that you can spend a year in preparation and planning, put up tens of thousands of dollars of your own money, and personally handle every logistical and technical detail yourself, but in the end, some parasite with a fiver in his bank account, no booking experience, and the kind of chip on his shoulder that can only come from a life devoid of exertion will absolutely know better than you how it all should really be done.

AS LOUD AS POSSIBLE: When you moved to New York from Florida, why did you feel the city needed another 'avant music' festival? Wasn't there enough already happening?

CARLOS GIFFONI: Absolutely not. Not only was there nothing in New York that was a proper festival for this kind of music, I would venture to say that the kind of fest I am doing actually did not exist anywhere in the world before I started it, and there still isn't another one like it.

Consider this:
1. We receive no arts funding; all the money to fly people and pay acts and all expenses come from ticket sales.
2. It has sold out every year that it has happened, with audiences between 400 and 600 people every night of the fest.
3. We have received international press from all major publications covering experimental and even some that usually cover only mainstream music, including three full articles in the *New York Times*.
4. I don't listen to any outside opinions when I book the fest; the bands playing are based on my own taste, and I try to mix it up and have representation from every sub-genre and present a proper picture of what the underground has to offer, mixed with the professionals that have been around for a while, reunion performances from long-gone acts, US premieres, international artists, etc. Incapacitants, Cluster, Borbetomagus, Merzbow, Astro, Wolf Eyes, Hair Police, Macronympha, Prurient, Arthur Doyle, Burning Star Core, Tony Conrad, Jim O'Rourke, Fe-Mail, Lasse Marhaug, Pita, Hecker, Illsuion of Safety, Magik Markers, Rat Bastard, Thurston Moore, Keiji Haino, Smegma, Zeena Parkins, Ikue Mori, Daniel Menche, Dinosaurs With Horns, Double Leopards, Religious Knives, Grunt, Sudden Infant, the Haters...just to name a few. How is that for diversity? There never was, and probably never would be, another festival, other than No Fun, that would have had all these people playing it. It was not possible until No Fun.

ALAP: Wasn't there already the No Music festival in NYC for a few years ago? NYC must have a lot of shows throughout the course of a year. Do you think that the festival could only happen within NY, or maybe it is possible further afield, and if that's the case for NFF, do you think you would have to make compromises? Wouldn't that go against what you are trying to achieve in the first place?

CG: No. The No Music Festival was a festival put together by the Nihilist Spasm Band that originally happened in London, Ontario. They hosted it one year in New York at Tonic — I actually played that, by the way, so I know first-hand. The concept of the festival was completely different — it was mostly improvisations by different musicians, with a few regular sets. The biggest night might have hosted 120 people at the outside. Additionally, it happened in the October after September 11, so most of the acts from overseas canceled. It was a great festival, but it was not completely successful due to circumstances, and has as much to do with No Fun as something like Lollapalooza or Reading. It's just another fest that I could use as contrast when thinking of ideas for the fest.

I think New York has many advantages, of course, one being that it's easy to reach from anywhere in the world, and that there are tons of people here. The thing is, I didn't come here one day and decide out of the blue, 'Oh, I am going to do this fest and it's going to be excellent.' I was here booking shows and trying different combinations of bands and venues for four years (plus three years touring and playing in Miami before that) before the fest, while at the same time touring and playing Europe/Japan/US and meeting people and checking out what was going on everywhere. I don't want to sound arrogant here, but I think more than the city itself, it's the fact that I am doing the fest and spend countless hours working on every detail, plus a combination of good friends that support me when I need them and a very big chunk of luck are the things that have made the fest this successful.

ALAP: No Fun 2008 was a big jump in the size of the venue from its previous locations. Were you concerned about the move of using a more noticeable 'mainstream' rock club instead of your normal DIY route?

CG: The Knitting factory is not exactly a 'mainstream' rock club. They have been around for a while, and when they first started about 20 years ago, they were almost exclusively hosting improvised music/free jazz/experimental/noise/etc. That went to the pits for a while in the late '90s and early '00s, but they have a few good people there that are trying to make things happen again and doing a good job. It is also the only mid-sized club that is supporting this type of music in Manhattan. Sadly, that will change soon, as they are getting booted out to Brooklyn.

Also, I've never actually held the fest at a DIY place. I previously used The Hook and North Six, both proper professional venues with a full staff, security, sound people, etc. The atmosphere at The Hook and the relationship I had with the owners and management there was so relaxed that it made you forget, but it was still a 'regular' venue. So, coming into The Knitting factory, which is a Manhattan venue with some of the staff 'hardened' by being there for so long, I expected that it would be a little different and that there would be situations to deal with that we had not dealt with in previous years, but there weren't any major problems. Everything worked out extremely well.

It has always very much been a super-important part of the festival to use proper venues, with proper staff, with a proper sound person and sound system, bar/security, everything legal and properly done. That is a big reason why the fest is still going after five years. I am a musician myself, so I know what a big difference it makes to have all these things and the importance of other small details, like having a meal after sound check to endure the length of the night. I am not giving away all of my secrets, but there are many things small and big that account for the success of the fest; a lot of calculated thought goes into it.

When you do things DIY, there is a lot of room for problems, last-minute circumstances, legal situations, etc. And people are more willing to come to a venue they have heard of before than to a field in the middle of nowhere. Of course, there is a lot of merit to DIY venues and I love playing in them, but then that would be a different fest, not No Fun. I have a very serious commitment to both the artists and the public coming to the fest to provide the best possible environment for them to have a good time and enjoy some intense sounds in the best possible conditions.

ALAP: The Knitting Factory was the third venue for the festival. What happened to the previous two?

CG: North Six was bought out by a large venue group, the same one that owns the Bowery Ballroom. It no longer exists in its previous form. It got renovated and is called The Music Hall of Williamsburg. It was the location for No Fun 2009. The Hook ran out of money and had to close.

ALAP: There seems to be a lot of NYC focus with the festival — surely a very large percentage of these groups play around NY regularly?

CG: Well if you take a good look at every year's lineup, less than 20% of the bands are from New York, which I think is pretty good. Even then, I try to keep it mixed and interesting with the local bands, try to time it so they have either something new to present, they haven't played for a while, or do something special for the fest.

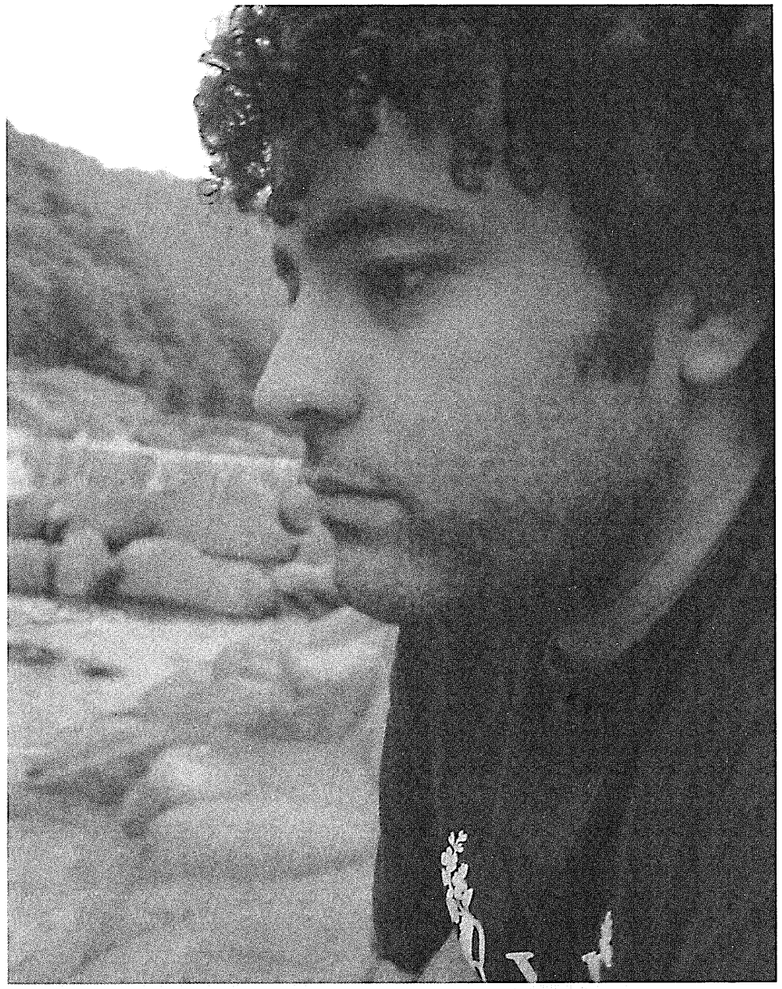
Additionally, the fact that the performance is for this fest makes the gig completely different from any other show they could play in NY; the atmosphere is different, the crowd is different (many people fly from all over the world), the organization is different, so even if they play a lot in New York, that doesn't mean they will be presenting the same as usual or that it will feel like a regular local show for them. The situation is very different.

ALAP: A big part of No Fun lineups over the years is the inclusion of collaborations, crossover projects, and side-projects of better-known bands. Any thoughts on this? Will we ever see a Prurient-free No Fun Fest?

CG: Yes this is definitely part of the festival, just as it is also a big part of experimental/improvised music. I am personally interested in the possibilities of collaborations and improvisation from people that have not played together before and have a special ability as improvisers. It's not an easy thing to do.

I almost never see the so-called 'side projects' as side projects, but I evaluate them as their own thing and only invite them to the fest if I feel like they're unique and have something new to offer. A perfect example is a band like Demons. I love analog synth music and they have their own style that sets them apart from a lot of acts playing within similar parameters; the fact that Nate is also in Wolf Eyes has close to nothing to do with them getting invited to play.

Prurient was not supposed to play in the fest in 2008, but Philip requested specifically to have him play as part of Consumer Electronics, and how can you ever say no to such a classy gentleman as Philip Best? Dominick and the Prurient project are very influential to new American music, and I am personally really looking forward to have Prurient again sometime in the future of the fest...



Carlos Giffoni. Photo by Megan Ellis

ALAP: I know you lost money on previous festivals. No Fun '07 you had a few flights from Japan to cover, whilst No Fun '08 seemed to be less of a financial risk. Was this the case? I'm not asking to find out who got paid what, but to understand the amount of risk taken in creating such an undertaking as this festival.

CG: In 2008, I had several flights from Europe (more than 2007) to cover, as well as more west coast people, and without going too far into it, specific larger fees to cover than in 2007. Actually, in 2007 I got over-excited because almost everyone I asked was able to do it, so I went over budget by a lot and miscalculated.

Let me be clear: if you want to know the amount of risk, basically we are talking about potentially losing between $10,000 and $25,000 if things were the performance from a few years ago when he first presented his shift from feedback-based composition to compositions using a wide variety of sounds while keeping a very dark atmosphere still ranks as one of my favorite moments of the fest.

to go wrong. It is pretty much the same every year. For me, that's a huge risk; I don't have a trust fund, or a rich family or anything like that. I am on my own, and already have plenty of debts to take care of.

ALAP: What have been your personal highlights of the festival...not only performances, but other related events?

CG: The first performance on the first festival, which was Burning Star Core, was one of the highlights, as it immediately felt like something big was happening, and it was also a really intense one and a perfect beginning. That same year, I also remember a really intense Wolf Eyes performance, Kim Gordon singing and trashing her guitar around on stage, and the weirdest performance in the history of Noise (To Live And Shave In LA with incredibly bad bad Techno playing as the foundation of the rest of the music) to name a few and sticking only to the first year. I could go on and on about each year. All the Japanese acts that have come and played the fest (Incapacitants, Merzbow, Solmania, Haino, Pain Jerk, Astro, etc.) are personal highlights, too. Having Cluster at the fest, and I already mentioned the Prurient performance from a few years ago. But really, instead of going on and on, I've got to say that every performance I've seen at the fest has had something special to it that I remember very much and will probably stick to me for the rest of my time, every one of them. Other than performances, the personal highlight is seeing a lot of good friends every year all together on the same place and sharing a few days of fun with them. That is always the biggest highlight every year. Some of these people are almost like family to me. And I have an Italian last name, so that means a lot.

ALAP: Has there been many incidents over the years? The most notorious one as far as I can recall was the mini-riot during the Macronympha set. What was the truth about this event, and indeed any others?

CG: For sure that's the most famous incident. What happened was that the performance got a little too intense on stage (pushing around, breaking things, throwing amps around) and some of the audience started to feed from it and react and it turned into a small riot, with chairs taken from stage, beer bottles flying, and smaller riots breaking out all around the audience. In the end, there were two people with minor injuries; we sent one to the clinic and he got eight stitches on his head. There are pictures of him smiling covered in blood before he had to go. I had it as my screen-saver for a while.

The club staff handled this perfectly and the fest continued without flaws. Looking back on it, it was a good time. Like I said, even the person that got injured was smiling and was back the next day for more. For a few minutes it was total chaos, but total chaos is not necessarily a bad thing.

Another memorable audience reaction is when Slogun played in 2007 and he tried to be really confrontational toward the audience. He got zero reaction back, except for being the first band ever booed off stage in the history of the fest. As far as trouble-making situations, there might have been a couple others that were quickly put under control and that I am not even going to go into, because those people do not even deserve to be talked about.

ALAP: As you stated, the bands are drawn from your own personal tastes, but at what point do you feel the lineup is too much of a crossover with the No Fun Productions label, and at what point do you think the festival, or parts of it, could be considered a NFP 'showcase' night?

CG: I have absolutely zero concern about this happening, and I am not trying to make friends when I put the lineup together. I am trying to do what I feel works. There is obviously going to be overlap because I am also trying to put out music by the bands I like; you also have to remember that the festival came **BEFORE** the label, so it's quite the opposite; bands that play the fest end up on the label because they blow my mind, I ask them to release material, and they realize they can work with me. It's very straightforward. In both the label and the fest, I try to put out the best of what's out there right now as I see it. The overlap is not accidental, it is essential.

ALAP: How and why did you select the sets/recordings you had by those artists who played the festival for release on NFP?

CG: Well, it starts with the artist playing a great set. Then I listen to all the recordings and if there aren't any problems with the recordings (wrong instrument levels, distortion, etc) I send them to the artist to see what they think. Finally, we agree on a format that makes sense and get it going. That's pretty much how it goes. If it was a 'special' set and I have a good quality recording of it and the artist approves it, it comes out as NFP release.

Sometimes the recording is not up to par, or if the performance is not one of their best then we pass on it. Of the 2008 fest, we have already decided to do a release of the Astro performance on CD, Whiteout + myself and Spencer Yeh on vinyl, and we are considering others like the Religious Knives performance as well.

ALAP: Have you a 'wish list' of artists you would want to play — either from the past or present?

CG: Yes, but it changes every year. Whenever I can't get someone that year, I pretty much just write their name to my 'wish list' for the following year unless there was something really sour during negotiations or their asking price is ridiculous. And a lot of it comes down to who do I really want to see play at the fest, regardless if they had played before or not. I ask Richard Rupenus about The New Blockaders performing every year, too (no collaborations just straight up Blockaders), with no luck yet. They are also my personal heroes and one of my all time favorites.

I don't want to talk too much about what the current list is, because I don't want to ruin any 'surprises' for future lineups, but some of the people that are on it are pretty obvious.

ALAP: You threw a lot of people a real curveball with the inclusion of Cluster. Why did you opt to get them to play? Surely there are enough active/contemporary outfits that could have fit the bill? Are you trying to show people where some of this music originates from?

CG: The answer is also very simple here: because I love the first few Cluster records. They are heroes to me. It suddenly became a possibility to add them to the bill and I took the chance to bring them to the US for the first time in 12 years very seriously and very excitedly. I am not trying to show people anything; I was only trying to have one my favorite bands of all time play at the fest.

There were tons of people who were super excited about it when I made the announcement, though my favorite reaction is when the younger kids, the ones who are just getting into Noise, or others that are obsessed with only the harsher side of things, went 'WHO?' Of course, I am hoping some of these kids took the chance to take a look at Cluster's back-catalog and peek at the history of electronic music, but that was not at all my primary aim when inviting them.

There might be many more 'contemporary' people

Wolf Eyes. No Fun. 2004. Photo by Stefano Giovannini

around I could have had, however I probably don't like them as much as I like Cluster.

ALAP: I know you get asked about the possibility of bands/artists playing a lot. How do you deal with this situation? I assume most requests come via email so you can ignore them? My favorite story is the one about the guy asking for 'an application form' so he could play...was that true?

CG: I read different online boards and check what people suggestions or 'dream lists' are. That said, I usually look at them to refresh my mind about what's out there and to see if there is something I missed that I want to have in the fest. I do not select any bands by what the most people say; that's not the way it works.

The way I see it, bands/artists playing a lot is a normal event. The 'better' bands, or at least the ones I like better out of the newer ones, tour more/put out more releases that are of good quality and therefore I pay more attention to them and feel like they are readier to put on a quality performance for everyone and one that I will like to see. And of course there are more American bands since the fest happens in the US. That said, I think that I have offered plenty of opportunities to young and new projects — if you look at each year's lineup, you'll see there is always a good amount of new American bands mixed in with veterans and international artists. I am very much for bringing as much of the spectrum of experimental/free/noise/avant garde/free jazz etc. together in one place, but of course they have to be very very good. Yeah, most requests come via email and they are all different: requests for my address to send demos, links to Myspace pages, requests for information on how to play the fest, maybe even for applications. Sure, there have been several hundred of them, most of them make some sense, but there have also been some funny ones. The best one was from a guy (I can't remember the country now but I think it was one of the countries previously in the Soviet Union) who was offering his performance as the Guinness book record holder of weight lifting using only his ears to lift the weight.

When possible, I try to personally reply to every message, and at least give an initial listen to the material. That said, there has never been a band that has been invited in this way. I would like to think that if someone is good enough, I will eventually notice them and give them an opportunity, or someone I trust will bring them to my attention, but I try to check everything out I receive just in case. Also, there are two ways of getting into the fest without sending me a demo or being good at anything: buy me season tickets for the Mets, or an EMS Synthi in working condition, and you get an automatic invitation to the fest.

ALAP: You get pretty much every set recorded. How did the concept for the DVD set come about, and has it increased the interest in the festival? Will it be an ongoing series — even if not via Load Records?

CG: The concept of the DVD came together thanks to director Chris Habib. He is a wonderful guy with many ideas and who very much loves the fest and has put forward endless hours (along with his girlfriend Monica) videotaping to painstakingly document every fest we have done so far. I think it has been a great tool to get a people a taste of what to expect, and a glimpse into what's going on here.

Very soon, we are going to start a limited run of DVDs with only three bands at a time and specially-made artwork (Chris has an amazing laser cutter, but I don't want to spoil his concept much further than that). We might collect some of that into a larger edition product later on. I am hoping we get the first DVD of the series out in the next few months. This will be on No Fun Productions. We get many offers from people to record the fest/do something 'professional' etc., but I always turn them down. I trust Chris much more because he has put his heart into the music and has been a supporter of the fest from the start. He has his own vision and aesthetic and has been a good friend for several years now.

ALAP: How have you found the press interest/reaction over the years? The bigger the fest has gotten, the more interest you've picked up. Has it been mainly positive?

CG: First of all I am super thankful to all the writers, journalists and bloggers that have supported the fest troughout the years. I owe them much of the fest's success. Yes, attention and press has grown with the years, but even from the beginning, there was a lot of press all over the place about it. The stranger part is actually that it seems like the local press is the most interested in it as it grows (New York Times, Time Out New York, Village Voice, New Yorker, New York Post, etc). We even got a mention in Newsweek that year and a big spot on the public broadcast radio show 'All Things Considered.' On the other hand, some of the more international specialty publications, the ones you would think would want to be covering what is potentially the biggest festival in experimental music in this country I think don't cover enough of it (The Wire, for example, has done only a few reviews in the several years the fest has been running, Signal To Noise did not send a reviewer this year, etc.).

But yeah, usually the reaction/interest is always very positive. I think the only time I hear anything negative is from people who are jaded for some reason, or people who have never even been to one of the fests. That's always the best...someone would write an article about something related and would say something about No Fun being a small fest for a small group of 'noise people' or complain about some of the acts playing. They don't realize or understand the scope and size of this thing. I guess any publicity is good publicity, no? And in the end, they are the ones looking like total fools here.

ALAP: One thing I have noticed during my NFF visits is that you remain completely unfazed by the situation if something's going wrong. Have you had any major panics during the festival?

CG: Well, that's just the way I am in general. Nothing positive comes out of freaking out and dealing with situations harshly; instead, it's better to step back and think about the different ways of solving it, asking for help when necessary, etc. This has nothing to with being spiritual / peaceful / etc., like some people that don't know me well have suggested in the past. Instead, I think it might be something that comes out naturally for me, just like it did when I solved math/physics problems in high school and college. I've always have an ability to solve those things that my fellow students usually hated me for, as I never spent many hours studying for anything. It is a matter of 1) placing yourself entirely in the situation you are facing and nowhere else, 2) thinking about what the best possible goal/outcome can be, and 3) being aware of your surroundings and possibilities within them. And then make the best possible choice to go forward.

Anyway, that's a little off topic, but going back to your question, the only time I thought things had a potential to go wrong was when Whitehouse and Consumer Electronics cancelled a few years ago at 3 am just three days before the fest. I think we ended up much better off with the replacements though, what with Macronympha coming back from the ashes for the fest and a mind-blowing performance by Borbetomagus. Mind you, I had to pull all that together just three days before the fest, but I wasn't alone in solving the situation. I have a very supportive group of friends that quickly advised me and helped me pull it together. Additionally, Mathew Bower, who was to play in The Hototogisu, missed his flight that same year, but Marcia, the other Hototogisu member, played an amazing set by herself.

ALAP: Now you've had time to reflect on the NFF 2009, how do you feel it all went? Any issues that might need addressing for future events?

CG: It all went very well. Like every year and every time I work with a new venue, there are a few logistical things that need sharpening that are of no interest to the general public, but I think everything ran as smooth as humanly possible, and it was a total success, so much so that I am inspired to try this again next year.

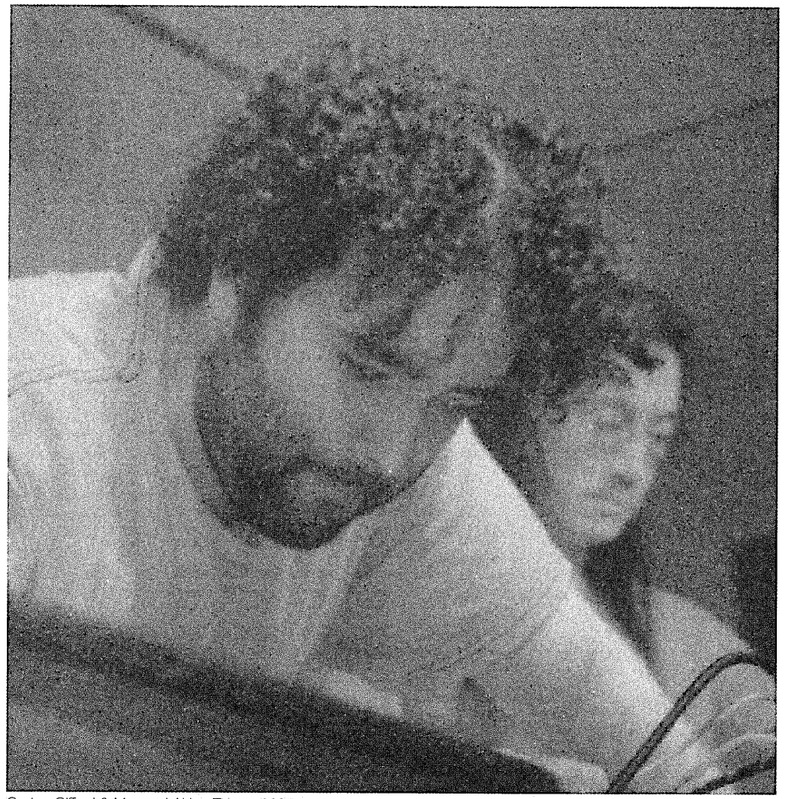
ALAP: How did No Fun Sweden come about? It seems more 'typical' in the name line-up. How intentional is that — keeping the connections going, etc.? How do you foresee overseas ideas for the future? Is this something you're going to develop?

CG: I'd been trying to get an international version (meaning outside of the U.S.) of the fest up and running for about three or four years. The conditions and right partners came up for Sweden, so I decided now was the time. Since this was the first non-U.S. festival we got to do, I wanted to make sure to do a few things that were key for me. First, to bring a good solid representation of American bands that we have supported throughout the years and that are still at the top of their game (bands like Wolf Eyes, Hair Police, Prurient, etc.). Secondly, to bring some of the new acts that are doing interesting things and coming up, bands that have yet to play those parts of the world (Emeralds, Noveller, Oneohtrix Point Never, etc.), but also keep it mixed up with a good measure of bands from the area and a few from the U.K., as well as a handful of bands that have never played the fest. Obviously, the approach was a little different than a lineup for the regular New York version of the fest, but that will probably change if we do more. I would love to have other versions of the fest all over the world. It's a matter of finding the right partner and situation to make it happen.

ALAP: Do you feel the Swedish No Fun was a success? If so, in what ways?

CG: Yes, great success. It was sold out every night and many people that attended kept asking if I would bring it back next year. Most acts were great, everything was on time, and everyone got paid as accorded, so I don't own anyone any money. We all had a killer time and partied hard. And ultimately I hope it inspired many of the people that came to start their own thing. And push forward.

ALAP: How did Joachim Nordwall of Ideal Records get involved? Obviously you need a lot of trust in the people you work with, as well as a professional outlook/attitude. Did you allow Ideal much input into the curating of the festival, or was it strictly on a 'local' level for the organisation/advertising, etc.



Carlos Giffoni & Masami Akita. Tokyo. 2007

CG: **We have been good friends for several years and I guess he had heard how I wanted to bring the fest to Europe and proposed that we partner for a Swedish version. I set up the general guidelines and 'rules' for it to work out as a No Fun and then he had some input on all levels as well as some suggestions for the lineup. But, like usual, it was mostly curated by me and I had the final say in the lineup. Joachim worked really hard in the organizing and working with the venue part as the local contact. It was a great collaboration and I hope we can figure out a way of doing it again someday.**

ALAP: **How do you feel your own tastes in music have altered or developed over the NFF years? Would you hope that the tastes of your audience would change too — maybe get the more open-minded to check out something they wouldn't normally have any interest in? That year's NFF seemed to offer many acts that previous year's festival goers might have previously ignored.**

CG: **Yeah, certainly as the years have passed, my taste in music has opened up a lot. It's kind of funny...the more you think you are into 'extreme' music, the more conservative and closed-minded you can become. Nowadays, I listen to a lot of stuff, lots of electronic music, some pop, some Black Metal, some experimental, some Hip Hop, even some Techno and Reggae!**

For the fest, I slowly push it in all sorts of directions that I think are both current and also present future directions of where things could go. I do hope that festival goers see something unexpected that clicks in their head and makes them approach music differently from that point on and think more openly about things...that's totally the intention!

ALAP: **Can you understand some people's concerns that perhaps you're attempting to popularize 'Noise' with such a high-profile event? Any thoughts on this angle? Would you consider the NFF as actually a 'Noise' festival or more of an avant/experimental event?**

CG: **Honestly, those people can stay home and not bother coming to the fest — that is a complete joke and a lack of grasp of reality. How many people go to a Britney Spears show? To a Madonna show? Even to a popular indie rock show? That is what 'popular' is. I am not trying to bring Noise to that level. What I am trying to do is to provide these bands a place for them to communicate with each other and with their audiences while providing them with an excellent sound system, professional staff, a comfortable space, and a three-day fest with a combination of acts like no other in the world. I always get asked what type of music or what type of a fest No Fun fest is, and I've changed my answer to this question many times until I figured out that there is a simple answer which is also a truthful answer, though it might upset people more than answer them. This probably one of the most important things I've said in this entire interview: the No Fun Festival is a festival of music I like. Period.**

ALAP: **If No Fun is held again in NYC next year (or upcoming years), will the Music Hall of Williamsburg likely be the venue again?**

CG: **Perhaps. I am always looking at all options and opportunities, but at this point in time it's the venue that fits best. Capacity is 600 + (we sold it out every night this year again), great audio system, professional staff. That's all great, but on the other hand, I am born South American, so I like when laws can be bended to favor everyone, and the club was very strict about things like capacity and other things like that. There will be no No Fun 2010 in New York, though. I am taking a year off to focus on other projects.**

ALAP: **How were your interactions with the management at the Music Hall of Williamsburg, and what was their view of your festival & its sonics? I ask because it seemed that while several acts were given a grand opportunity to test the (considerable) speaker system, many others were transmitted rather gingerly. Did you encounter resistance from the sound crew to push the sound system for some acts?**

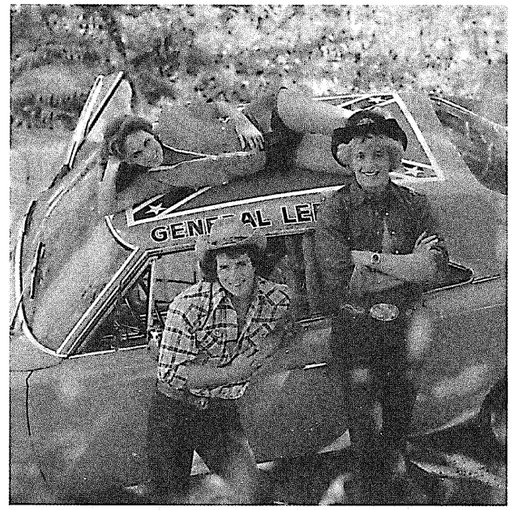
CG: **There was zero resistance from sound crew except when levels were beyond what the sound system could take. People had sound checks and could try/ask for things then. If they didn't, it's their loss. If they had problems with their gear during their set, that's also outside our control. Additionally, they were always open to people having their own sound person. Management at the club always approached everything as 'business' — there was no opinion on the sound or band presented, and as long as people were coming in they were happy, and as long as they did their job (which they did wonderfully), I was happy with them. We are all adults here. Playtime is over.**

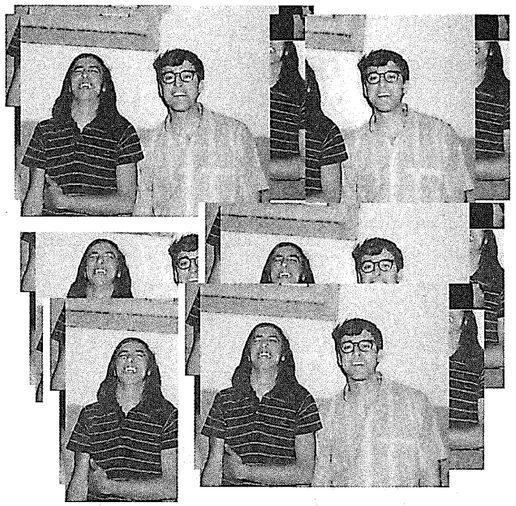
ALAP: **The last year's No Fun was roughly half the size of previous year's festivals, due to the lack of multi-stage environment. Are the days of 50-act No Fun festivals over?**

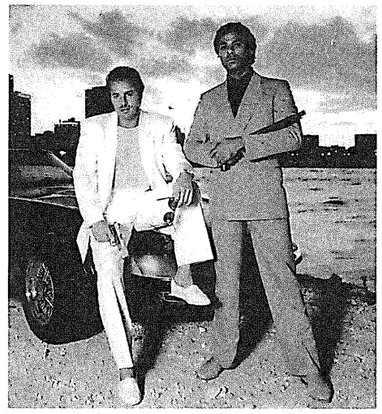
CG: **It was only half the size as far as number of bands; it was the most crowded one yet as far as public goes. I feel that things can be controlled and managed better this way. It always depends on the setting of the fest, though. If I find a place in the future where it makes sense to have multiple stages, I will do it. This is not a priority for me at this point, though. Through the years, I have learned to say things clearly with a few sentences instead of having to write a whole book about every single thing I want to say.**

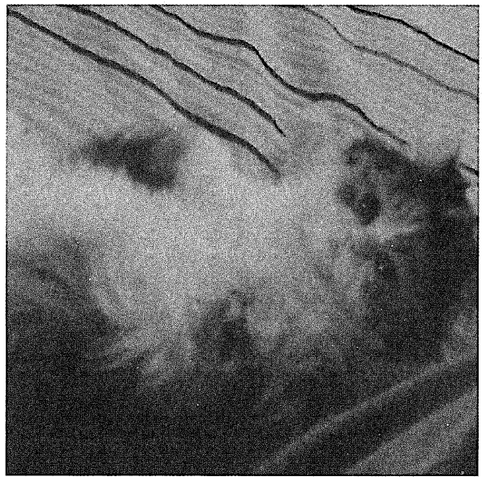
To reiterate, though, there will be no No Fun 2010 in New York. We are working on some more opportunities in the rest of Europe, and there is lots of interest. This type of horizontal growth on a worldwide level right now is more interesting to me than trying to focus things in one specific place, as the NYC fest is currently getting to a point where things are too serious and hard to deal with for one person due to the size of it. Yes, I could hire people to work with me or make things more 'official,' but besides the wild selection of music, this festival has always been about community and making connections, sharing your life for 3 or 4 days with people that have something to say and that have views and approaches that help each of us grow. This is also part of the reason why you see some of the people back and back again each year. It is part of the ethos of the fest. Perhaps I'll decide to bring it back to NYC in 2011; I need time to think about it and to come up with a new approach to things.

Everything I wanted to accomplish with the fest in New York so far has been accomplished, and even surpassed. It has been a success beyond my wildest expectations. Now it's time to search for new horizons.









NO FUN
PRODUCTIONS
Distributed by Darla, Cargo,
Mimaroglu, Metamkine
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a broken flag product

issue one

FARBEN

we didnt commit suicide

we committed an act of

revolutionary suicide protesting

the conditions of an

inhuman world

THE BROKEN FLAG STORY

AN INVESTIGATION

BY STEVE UNDERWOOD

It would be impossible to begin a discussion of the output of the Broken Flag label without using the word 'legendary.' Though the label effectively folded in the mid-'80s, its influence is still being felt throughout the many dark corners of experimental noise music, in terms of not only the sound, but also the presentation of artwork and ideas, as well as the distribution of those ideas via totally off-the-radar subterranean networking. Over the years, the few biographical details that did exist were well-suited to embellishment, therefore building upon the myth, twisting it to fit people's perception of the label. After many years with a complete lack of interest in his label's back catalogue, Broken Flag founder Gary Mundy felt the time was now more suitable to not only start recording his own electronic music again, but to also talk about the past and maybe clear up some of those long-standing questions that have hung over him and his work for many years.

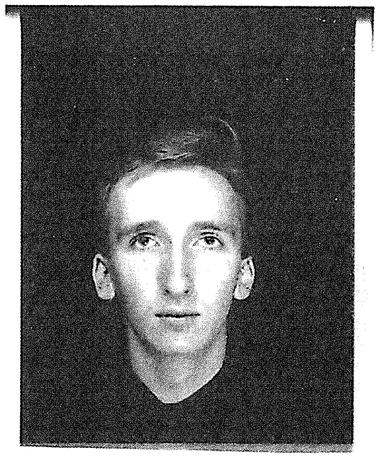
After lifting the label name from a track title on Patti Smith's *Wave* album sometime during early 1982, the Broken Flag moniker became an umbrella under which Gary Mundy and Debbie Thomas went about setting up the label, originally just as a name under which to release material by A Cruel Memory, Mundy's abstract post-Punk band at the time. But a combination of experimenting at home with synths and then catching the first Whitehouse live performance in London gave them the impetus to overhaul the label and give it a new direction, relaunching the label as a catch-all multi-media outlet for both printed publications and music, most notably that of Mundy's latest project, his new band Ramleh.

Bob Strudwick was Mundy's counterpart in Ramleh for almost a year, but an unwillingness to play live forced a replacement by Jerome Clegg. Clegg made his debut at the band's first live performance, only ever playing a handful of live shows over a period of about 13 months, from the opening band on the bill of the Equinox festival up to walking offstage before the end of their final set at The Air Gallery. (Mostly, this happened thanks to Mundy's long-term friendship with Philip Best, as support to Whitehouse.) By burying themselves in amongst an impenetrable mass of weaving tones bookended by the piercing shrill cries of the hi-end and the bottom-end bass avalanche, Ramleh couldn't have offered a bleaker contrast to the headliner's clarity and vocal gymnastics, the vocals so far down in the mix as to almost become another instrument and adding to the disorientation as it verged on the almost psychedelic, albeit a murky, dark, menacing brand of it.

Over the following years, Ramleh underwent many transformations and today can be found working in two formations; one with a more psych-rock based sound, the other harking back to their Power Electronics roots, with Mundy working alongside another long-term friend and collaborator, Anthony DiFranco. Now, as then, Ramleh refuse to sit still.

Within the U.K., the first few years of the '80s threw up many new record labels such as Sterile, Recloose Organisation, and Cause For Concern amongst others that were only too willing to push things that little further out in both print and audio, but none have gone on to offer as much inspirational motivation to younger noise artists over the years as the name of Broken Flag. The first vinyl release Mundy issued, the *Neuengamme* compilation album, still stands today as the benchmark Power Electronics compilation. This record and the label's few other vinyl releases, along with the 70-plus cassettes the label issued have long helped to cement the legendary status that the label holds.

As with most histories, this one too is hampered by vague or faulty memories, some slight (maybe intentional) revisionism, a personal beef or two, or simply a wish to leave the past there and not wallow in nostalgia. However, most of the participants in the Broken Flag story were only too willing to talk, with only a couple of exceptions. A very few proved untraceable. The scope of the article is such that it is an impossibility to fully cover some of the artists as in-depth as their work demands. Therefore, we at As Loud As Possible aim to build upon the interviews presented here over future issues, which will allow us to focus more on that chosen particular artist and their output, because, as you may be aware, most have gone on to build an extensive catalogue of work over the passing years, much of which require a closer examination. To get you started, we have added brief introductions to most Broken Flag artists throughout the article.



Gary Mundy. 1980s

ALAP: **You formed A Cruel Memory with your friends from school. How much of a post-Punk scene was there around Croydon at this time? Did you know people from the area with similar tastes and ideas, or was it that London is within such easy reach that you knew people?**

GARY MUNDY: **There was very little scene of any sort around Croydon apart from us and a very small handful of others. Most people I knew lived up in London. We just happened to live in and around Croydon and had been to school together but we felt no pride in our town or any bullshit like that.**

ALAP: **I thought you might have had some sort of local scene going on and that's why you ended up working on that first Anne Clark** (1) **album. Did that come about because she was a local artist, and was it your first studio experience?**

GM: **The Anne Clark thing came about from an advert Anne placed asking for musicians to back her reading her poetry, and as she was based in Croydon we met up. A Cruel Memory became her sort of backing band for a short while, and we made that first album with her. I had been in studios before with A Cruel Memory, but this was the first thing I recorded that got released. We played live with Anne once at a gig in Harlow which was organised by Attila The Stockbroker** (2)**, or John as I think he was really called. We got cold feet at the last minute, but he made some sort of threat to Anne and she said that we would have to do the show, so we turned up and played free-form noise behind her poetry and everybody hated it. Anne guested at a couple of ACM shows too, but I think by the time Ramleh started, we had gone our separate ways.**

ALAP: **Obviously Miss Clark went onto much bigger things, but that first album, *The Sitting Room*, not only featured Patrik Fitzgerald — I'm guessing the one and only?** (3) **— but also Dominic Appleton, who you went on to form Breathless with a little later, right?**

GM: **Yes, it was the Patrik Fitzgerald of 'Safety Pin Stuck in my Heart' fame. Dominic and I knew each other from our school days and had started bands together since the age of sixteen, including ACM. After that finished, Dominic formed a band with Ari Neufeld and they asked me if I would play guitar. I agreed to go along to a few rehearsals to see how it worked out and ended up staying; that became Breathless, which is where I later met Martyn Watts, who is now the drummer in Ramleh.**

ALAP: **I didn't realise that Dominic was in ACM. How would you describe the A Cruel Memory work now and what was your input to the group?**

GM: **A Cruel Memory was an experimental band that would be described as post-Punk nowadays. The line-up was guitar, bass, drums, keyboards and clarinet. I sang and played guitar, and a little bass too. It was very anti-rock actually, nothing like the stuff I would do later with Ramleh except for the sound of my voice, of course, which is what it is.**

ALAP: **Can you tell us about your musical interests at the time, and were you a big record buyer?**

GM: **I've always been a huge record buyer. I like far more things than the music I personally create. At that time, I liked a lot of the post-Punk stuff like Wire, This Heat, Section 25, Mass, In Camera, Public Image, Cabaret Voltaire and The Fall. I liked Throbbing Gristle and S.P.K., too, but at that time they meant nothing more to me than the others. I wasn't leaning towards that kind of thing particularly.**

ALAP: **Do you feel those bands had a direct influence on you or was it the more obscure ones that motivated you? Over time, you've mentioned to me many obscure acts and I assume the dedication of these smaller under-acknowledged bands helps to motivate you?**

GM: **I was always looking for something new. When you're younger, a lot more things seem new because you haven't heard too much to compare things with. That said, I think there was a lot of originality in those early post-Punk years, although eventually things took a huge turn for the worse. I think I inherited an attitude from some of the bands, some musical influence too, but not as much as you would expect. I devoured this stuff quickly at the time and was rapidly getting through all the bands, looking for something truly life changing. Putting out your own records, keeping things fairly obscure, and not giving too much away was always appealing to me.**

ALAP: **When you say "turn for the worse," I assume you're talking about the white funk music horrors that also pushed you to start Ramleh? Guessing it was more the likes of Portion Control and 23 Skidoo than Level 42** (4) **that you were disappointed by?**

GM: **Pretty much. Yes, I liked some of the first things that bands like 23 Skidoo and A Certain Ratio did, but once they worked out how to make their 'mutant funk' into 'straight funk,' it got very dull. There was a lot of great early black funk out there and these bands were just weak imitations of that. They gave up their originality to move into the realms of second-rate pastiche. I thought it was really sad. Music got very bland and predictable after that for a really long time.**

ALAP: **I guess Patti Smith was a regular purchase too? What drew you to take her track title for your label's name? Was it some kind of romantic notion of bravery in the face of the enemy, as that track's dedication on her *Wave* album?**

GM: **I liked Patti Smith, I liked that song, I liked that title, and it just sounded right for the kind of label I wanted.** (5)

ALAP: **Another Smith 'reference' turned up later on those PURE CDs, right? It's not an obvious one.**

GM: **I wondered if anyone would spot it. It brought things full circle and it also sounds incredibly arrogant in the context it was used, which I found quite funny. I slipped another reference into the Broken Flag box set too, which nobody seems to have spotted.**

BF1 - A CRUEL MEMORY, Psychiatre
BF2 - A CRUEL MEMORY, Home Recording

ALAP: **You used the Broken Flag name on a couple of A Cruel Memory cassettes that you released prior to Ramleh, so you must have had visions of running your own label early on? Was this as a nod to the DIY mentality, or did you feel that 'real' record companies just wouldn't be interested?**

GM: **I liked the idea of running my own label, but it wasn't until Ramleh that I had a real vision for it. I don't think it even occurred to us to approach any record labels, as we always knew that we would release our own records. I certainly wasn't willing to compromise on anything in those days, but before we were able to put out an A Cruel Memory record, Bob and I formed Ramleh and ACM fell apart very quickly after that.**

ALAP: **So Bob recorded that first Ramleh cassette with you in May 1982 and stayed right until June of the following year? That cassette was recorded as a 'soundtrack' for the execution of Adolf Eichmann** (6)**, right?**

GM: **Yeah, Bob left just before the Equinox Event. That first tape was more music inspired by the execution than a soundtrack for it as such. It was a way to bind the music together, really, as it happened to be the 20th anniversary. I loved the name Ramleh and it seemed like an interesting concept, so we went for it. I got a bit of hassle about it and for some of the other stuff over the years, but most of it was kept fairly ambiguous, and most people that bought stuff from me didn't seem to be Nazi sympathisers or anything like that, so I think people got where we were coming from. It's always a dodgy area to get into, though.**

ALAP: **You caught Whitehouse playing at their first 'Live Aktion,' but what prompted you to go to that gig? Did you get dragged along, or were you aware of the records they had published by this point? Was it really such a calling that you wanted to form a band along the same lines?**

GM: **A friend of mine saw it mentioned in Time Out** (7) **and said 'this sounds interesting.' I hadn't heard of Whitehouse at this point. He was right, it did sound interesting, so we went along. It was a real Sex Pistols at The 100 Club moment for me. It was my punk rock! I saw the show and I just knew exactly what I had to do. I didn't want to be exactly like Whitehouse, but I knew that we could do something similar while bringing our own twist to it. I much preferred the live show to those early records, as interesting as they were, but it was the live sound that inspired Ramleh, the use of echo. I think it was Dave Kenny from IPS Studios doing the sound that night. I had had ideas for feedback and synth noise-based music before and had made various experiments, but it was Whitehouse that showed me that not only could you make that kind of music, but you could get onstage and perform it live, and that you could make records and people would listen. It didn't have to be home recordings for your own amusement and it was just really exciting. I don't think ultimately that the early Ramleh stuff sounds that much like Whitehouse, as there was always an almost psychedelic edge to Ramleh and our music wasn't as minimal as the early Whitehouse records. I always wanted to fill all the space with sound, but without Whitehouse, Ramleh wouldn't have existed, at least not in the form that we did.**

ALAP: **That was March 1982, but had you acted on those ideas about feedback, etc. prior to seeing Whitehouse?**

GM: **Just home experiments. I was fascinated with synths and less interested in playing the guitar at that point, and just tried a lot of stuff out, but it was a bit unfocussed before Ramleh.**

ALAP: **So these would have been the S.P.I.T.E. recordings or working up to those? What kind of equipment were you using then?**

GM: **Some of it would have been the S.P.I.T.E. recordings, but other things fell by the wayside. I recorded masses of material in those days and wiped over a lot of the less successful experiments. It was mostly done with a Wasp synth, organ, echo boxes, distortion and vocals, like a politer version of Ramleh if that makes sense.**

ALAP: **You claimed that the S.P.I.T.E. cassette wasn't in keeping with the label, so you deleted it pretty swiftly, but I don't hear it that way. What are your thoughts on that *Violence* tape now?**

GM: **Listening again, it sounds pretty similar to Ramleh. Back then, I wanted to wipe out all the pre-Ramleh material, but *Violence* is the only one that did sort of fit. I don't know why I was so down on it at the time, really.**

ALAP: **So you went on to catch most of the Whitehouse shows around London after that one. Any interesting experiences?**

GM: **I saw both of the Whisky-A-Go-Go shows and two, or maybe three, at the Centro Iberico, and one time supporting some anarchist punk bands at The Greyhound, with a great set from John Murphy making some great noise. After that we did the few**

Footnotes:

(1) Anne Clark: Poet and songwriter from Croydon, England. She has gone on to be a massively popular artist throughout the world who has explored many musical styles over the years throughout her extensive discography. Material featured on her debut album 'The Sitting Room' (Red Flame, 1982) is widely available.

(2) Attila The Stockbroker: For a short period towards the end of 1982, the 'ranting poet' style of Attila and also Seething Wells was popular. Both guys were left-wing music journalists hidden beneath pseudonyms.

(3) Patrik Fitzgerald: Legendary punk-poet who recorded his best material between 1977 and '79. His work was released by the Small Wonder record label from London. Mostly just the sound of his voice and a guitar with occasional backing band. A retrospective CD on Anagram Records is common.

(4) Level 42: Overtly radio-friendly white-funk band popular throughout the '80s. Their saccharine-coated tunes were best personified by the smug smile constantly displayed across front-man Mark King's face.

(5) Patti Smith: U.S. poet and musician known for her involvement with the New York music scene in the mid-'70s, centered on the club CBGB. Smith's first four albums combined her terse, often confrontational lyrics over a rough, proto-Punk music by her band (led by Lenny Kaye), a combination hugely influential on the style of Gary Mundy and others. Conventional wisdom is to start with her full-length debut, 'Horses,' though the song 'Broken Flag' comes from the fourth album, 'Wave.' We'll leave it to you to find the locations of the other references.

(6) Adolf Eichmann: High-ranking SS officer sometimes referred to as 'The architect of the Holocaust' due to his part in organizing the transport of Jews to concentration camps. Eichmann escaped to Argentina after World War II and was eventually captured by Mossad agents in 1960, who brought him to Jerusalem to stand trial. His trial in 1962 led to his hanging on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Eichmann's famous, highly-televised trial was later used as a visual backdrop for a Whitehouse performance on one of the 'Ultra' video compilations.

(7) Time Out: London-based events listing magazine with large circulation. The parent company (Time Out Publishing) has since created similar magazines in 25 other large cities, including New York, Chicago, Dubai, Moscow, and Beijing.

shows and after I fell out with William I didn't see them again until a few years ago. The shows were usually very brief, about twenty to thirty minutes, but that was all it needed, really. Philip supported at one of the Centro Iberico shows, but I missed his performance; I don't think I knew him then, but I had heard about this 15-year-old noise wizard and was sorry to have missed it. There was no trouble at the shows 'til The Roebuck one, which, I think, was the first live show with Philip and Kevin Tomkins in the lineup. After that, people expected trouble and it got boring pretty quickly. People started thinking that letting off CS gas canisters in the first five minutes was what you were supposed to do. It was a bit of a dead end, really, with people just showing up for the violence and not the music. It took me about two years to go from loving the whole scene to hating it.

BF3 - A NEW COMMANDMENT, Improvisation of a Role for Self
BF4 - VARIOUS, Correction

ALAP: **Can you tell me about the *Correction* compilation? I assumed it was, finally, released as *Neuengamme* later on, but with the tracks from 400 Blows and Nocturnal Emissions dropped?**

GM: **I forget now, but 400 Blows were originally meant to be on what became *Neuengamme*, but I decided that the track didn't really fit in. They weren't too happy. They were part of the Croydon non-scene and nice people, but I just didn't see the label going that way. I don't remember approaching Nocturnal Emissions, but maybe I did, I forget now.**

ALAP: **According to some of the early Broken Flag blurbs I have, you had them listed for inclusion. Why did you opt for a compilation as a way of debuting the label?**

GM: **That shows the tricks that memory plays, then. I had completely forgotten that I ever had any contact with Nocturnal Emissions. A compilation seemed like a good way in, and I figured that people who liked one of the bands would already want it and would be exposed to Ramleh and Kleistwahr amongst the other featured acts. As it took shape, it seemed to me that it was becoming a Power Electronics compilation, and that's why some tracks weren't used. I kept Esplendor Geometrico and P16.D4 though, because even though they weren't PE, I thought those tracks fitted in very well. I'm still very happy with how that record turned out. It put Broken Flag on the map and also ensured that when the Ramleh records came out, people would want them.**

ALAP: **There was a BF3 cassette credited to A New Commandment issued prior to that compilation. Can you clear that one up for me?**

GM: **My memory of it is that it was some music recorded by me with the drummer from ACM. I haven't heard it since, neither have the tapes now.**

BF1 - RAMLEH, 31/5/62/82
BF2 - S.P.I.T.E., Violence

ALAP: **How did Debbie Thomas get involved in setting up the label with you? Was this a little later on, when you 'reinvented' the label with the *31/5/62/82* cassette as the first release?**

GM: **Debbie was there from the start. We decided that the two of us would run things; other people helped us out, but it was our label essentially. Debbie concentrated more on the magazines and I concentrated more on the music, and it worked very well. We had ideas about being some kind of multi-media organization, but it just boiled down to music and magazines eventually. When Bob and I started Ramleh, I decided to scrap the early label stuff and start from scratch with the first Ramleh release. It all fell into place very quickly after that. We saw where we wanted to go.**

ALAP: **So Bob's ideas & tastes were similar to yours?**

GM: **Not always, but we crossed at enough points to make it work. Bob was the other half of Ramleh for about a year, but wasn't involved with the running of the label, really, and when it came to taking Ramleh onto the stage, he didn't want to know and left the band. I think he lost interest in that kind of music fairly quickly.**

ALAP: **KKK [short for 'King Krown and Kountry'] was the first Broken Flag magazine publication, so that started up about the same time as the first Ramleh cassette. There's very little music coverage in those magazines, so I guess that was a conscious decision?**

GM: **The first magazine would have been around that time. It was never intended to be a music magazine, as we didn't want album reviews and interviews with bands, really, just articles that complimented the subject matter of the records and tapes. There were six issues of that first magazine in over a year or so, and then there were two issues of Farben, and, later, two issues of Even When It Makes no Sense, the latter trying to take a more intellectual approach with varying results. The idea was that instead of a musician sending a track to a compilation, a writer could send an article on a suggested theme. Some people provided music and writing or artwork, others just one, but I liked the idea. Debbie wrote most of the early magazines, especially Farben, but after she had gone I started on Even When. I was more of an editor and only contributed my own thoughts sparingly.**

ALAP: **Why did Debbie leave? Had she lost interest?**

GM: **I suppose so. Also, she was in a relationship with Jerome Clegg and when they broke up, it coincided with the end of the PE phase of Ramleh. I had new ideas about what to do next and Debbie wanted to do her own thing. It was all amicable between me and Debbie, though, and we stayed friends for years afterwards before she left to go 'round the world exploring. I haven't seen her since.**

ALAP: **When you started taking Broken Flag as a serious proposition with the first vinyl release, did you get some funding? How did you support the label?**

GM: **The only funding I ever got was bank loans. I used to borrow the money and then use the money from the sales of the records to pay it off, and then borrow more for the next one. There was very little profit on runs as short as I was doing, but that wasn't why I did the releases anyway.**

BF3 - KLEISTWAHR, Myth
BF15 - KLEISTWAHR, Arsonicide
BF27 - KLEISTWAHR, Mobility
BF51 - KLEISTWAHR, Don't Let Go
BF52 - KLEISTWAHR, Do Not

ALAP: **How did those Kleistwahr cassettes come about? There are some similarities with the Ramleh sound, so I'm guessing it was just an extension of your working out of ideas for Ramleh?**

GM: **I wanted to get a few releases out to get the label up and running, so I decided to invent a group called Kleistwahr, which would be, secretly, my solo project. The equipment that we used for Ramleh was set up at my house most of the time, so when I had some time to myself, I would work on the Kleistwahr material. It was never so much a way of trying out ideas for Ramleh as it was a totally separate thing, although as I was involved with both projects, there is naturally a certain similarity. With the latter Kleistwahr tapes, it became a way of me experimenting and getting further away from Power Electronics.**

ALAP: **Throughout Ramleh's history, you've always had a solo side project running at various points. Why was this? The last one 'til recently was the Blind Alley CD. Any plans for any more, including the 'new' Kleistwahr?**

GM: **It's difficult to get everyone together as often as I would like, so I often work on my own as I get too impatient. Every now and then, I get enough solo material together to release. I called the '90s project Blind Alley as it was very different from Kleistwahr and it seemed like a separate project, but I've reactivated Kleistwahr now as I'm working with electronics again, and there will be another album next year, hopefully. The last one, *The Return*, got a mixed reception.**

ALAP: **Why was that?**

GM: **I don't think some people liked the mix of guitar and electronics, but I was really pleased with it. I'm not sure what the next one will sound like, but it won't be exactly like any of the other Kleistwahr releases because I get bored really quickly and need to keep trying different things.**

BF5 - MALE RAPE GROUP, On To 83

ALAP: **You were living with Philip Best towards the end of 1982 and this was the time you recorded the Male Rape Group cassette. Curious as to why you never worked more with Philip during this period. Was it due to him being tied to Whitehouse?**

GM: **It never really occurred to me or Philip to work together until the night we decided to do *On To 83*. I think Philip suggested it. Although the results were great, we didn't work together again for about six years. Obviously, when he joined Whitehouse it stopped him doing Consumer Electronics and I suppose that would have had some bearing, too. Actually, I did help out on the tracks for *Statement* that Philip recorded anonymously, but I think that was about it until we did that Worried Well single and then Ramleh in 1988.**

ALAP: **Were there two versions of the cassette? It was released on both Broken Flag and Iphar. Did Philip 'rework' the Iphar one?**

GM: **We both loved it and wanted to release it, so the compromise was made that we would both put it out. I don't recall Philip's version being reworked at all and the version that ended up on the Vinyl-On-Demand set is the only one I'm aware of. I still think it sounds amazing. A real meeting of sick minds. I'm very proud of it.**

BF6 - RAMLEH, Live to Theresienstadt

Recorded live at home at about 3 am in the morning on January 1st, 1983. This is the only 'live' recording that features the duo of Gary Mundy and Bob Strudwick, utilizing a Wasp synth, Casio keyboard, and backing tapes.

ALAP: **How much musical input did Bob, and then Jerome, have with the band? Do you feel they both brought in something different to each other?**

GM: **They both contributed a lot. It was pretty much 50/50 in both versions of the band. Bob and I had played bands together before and knew each other well, so there was a fairly instinctive interaction there. With Jerome, I'd only known him a short while, so we had to learn how to work together, but it worked amazingly well very quickly. Jerome played bass and synth, whereas Bob also played guitar, drums and clarinet, so there were different possibilities as a result. Bob also had an incredible voice for Power Electronics. He could make deafening shrieking noises. If you listen to something like 'Emaciator' or the track 'Ramleh,' that's mostly Bob shrieking away there. Jerome was more into Noise and Industrial than Bob, though, so he brought a different attitude to the band.**

ALAP: **How did you know Jerome Clegg, then? Did you have to talk him into playing for Ramleh?**

GM: **Jerome shared a house with me and the drummer from ACM, along with another friend of his, so when Bob quit Ramleh, Jerome was there, and I knew he was into what we did and that he knew his way 'round a synth too. I asked him to join and he agreed. Three weeks later we recorded the *A Return To Slavery* record and played at The Equinox Event.**

BF7 - RAMLEH, Live McCarthy

The public debut of Ramleh was at the Equinox Event on June 21st, 1983, held at the L.M.C. in Camden, north London. Due to mix-ups and personal issues between both artists and organizers, the originally-planned lineup for the event didn't materialize and the day degenerated into chaos. Ramleh played first.

ALAP: **How did you get involved with the Equinox Event? Was it set up by the Produktion people?**

GM: **From what I recall, it was mainly organised by Ross Cannon (Produktion) and Mary Dowd, who had had connections with Come Org prior to that. They asked us to play it, but it must have been quite late in the day, though, as we aren't on the poster.**

ALAP: **When did you get connected to the Produktion crew, and was it just Ross Cannon and Paul Hurst running it?**

GM: **I first met Ross and Paul actually at Produktion, which was their hair-dressing 'salon.' Having seen Whitehouse at that Whisky-a-Go-Go live aktion, I had found out that their records were available there. It was just the two of them, from what I remember. Paul was a huge fan of Whitehouse and Nurse With Wound and had a selection of records for sale in a room at the other side of the salon. He persuaded me to buy pretty much everything they had there, and I went back regularly, although never for a haircut, as they specialised in unusual looks, and I didn't feel the need to 'look the part,' as it were. I've always maintained a fairly anonymous appearance. I think dressing up is more for an audience, really.**

I found Philip Best through Produktion, too. He published a magazine called Intolerance, which I brought from Produktion, and I wrote to him at the address given on the magazine. Most of us used our home addresses on our advertising and in our magazines in those days. It never occurred to me at the start that people knowing where you lived might be a problem when dealing with the material we were using.

ALAP: **I just recall Kensington Market as being a terrible indoor clothes market for the 'positive punk,' and later the Goth crowd. Am I being unfair here?**

GM: **No, you're right, really. I only ever went there because of Produktion. It was a hideous place otherwise. Produktion was on the top floor, hidden away from much of the market, and it didn't really feel like it belonged with the rest of it. I got some great political pamphlets outside there, too, which I raided for images and ideas. A lot of Iranian stuff, as I recall, amongst other things.**

ALAP: **What was Mary Dowd's connection to it all?**

GM: **I'm not too sure how involved she was with Come Org, but she was certainly around at all the shows and knew everyone, but other than organising the Equinox Event with Ross, I'm not too sure if she did anything else. Actually, now that I'm thinking about it, I remember her interviewing Kevin Tomkins for one of the Come Org's Ultra videos around at William Bennett's flat in Highgate. I was there, too, but I think William interviewed me and Debbie.**

ALAP: **Looking back at the Equinox Event, how do you view it?**

GM: **I had a great time. It was our first proper show and I was pretty nervous, so I drank too much before, and during, the performance and gave an uncharacteristically boisterous performance — I'm usually pretty static onstage. We played first and set the bar quite high for obnoxious behaviour that night and everyone that followed tried to take things a step further until it all degenerated into chaos, but when you're young and drunk, that seems like a good night out! It's an event that people remember, certainly.**

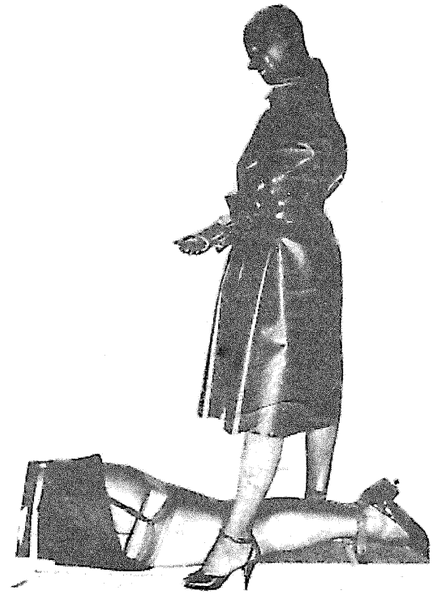
ALAP: **On the recordings, you can hear the smashing of glasses. What was going on?**

GM: **I finished off a bottle of rum whilst onstage and threw it into the crowd, who as I recall were, somewhat bizarrely, sitting on the floor. The bottle smashed on the ground and someone nearby understandably took exception to this and threw some of the broken pieces back at me, which I then threw back again, hence the glass smashing noises. I cut**

FARBEN

ISSUE TWO

a broken flag product



myself, though, which I suppose I deserved, but at the time it seemed like fun, but pretty idiotic looking back.

ALAP: **Test Department pulled out of the event the week before. Who else never got to play?**

GM: **I don't know. I don't remember that Test Department were going to play. I think possibly Etat Brut were on the poster and maybe even Nurse With Wound. Steve Stapleton was certainly there, although again he didn't perform. Whitehouse were supposed to be the mystery guests, but Mary had banned them, as she had fallen out with Philip by then. They turned up anyway but didn't play.**

ALAP: **I understand the Club Moral people weren't too happy with the evening, and didn't you end up getting a death threat?**

GM: **Mary had had an argument with Philip Best and was pretty pissed off that he was there. He was being very vocal too from what I remember, and eventually she flipped out and filled a large dustbin full of water and went and poured it over Philip. Sadly, I was sitting with him at the time and got half of it over me. This was going on during a set by DDV and AMVK from Club Moral, and they were told afterwards, for some reason, that it was me rather than Philip who had caused the problems with Mary and disrupted their show. So Danny sent me...not exactly a death threat, but some kind of hate-poem, hoping that my dick would drop off and I would die, or something similar. Philip and I both thought this was hysterical and I decided that instead of putting him straight, I would just publish the letter without comment in one of our Broken Flag magazines. Eventually, someone told Danny of his error, he apologised to me, and we got back on good terms again later on. I also distributed his excellent Force Mental magazine through Broken Flag for a while.**

ALAP: **Where did you source the live recordings from? The BF7 sounds very much like a mixing desk recording?**

GM: **There are two recordings. One is from a two-track cassette player that I used to use for everything in those days. I loved that machine and I wish I still had it; it recorded live shows brilliantly. The other was made by someone, I forget who, in the audience and they sent me a copy or someone else did. I liked getting different recordings, as they always differed considerably and seemed to be valid almost as separate works.**

BF4 / BFV1 - VARIOUS, Neuengamme

This compilation is considered by many to be the Power Electronics set by which all others should be judged. Even though contributors P16.D4 supplied Musique Concrète and the Spanish band Esplendor Geometrico their crunchy, rhythmic, Industrial style, both artists' contributions still sit comfortably alongside the PE genre's cherished forefathers: Whitehouse, Sutcliffe Jugend, Consumer Electronics, Maurizio Bianchi, and Ramleh. Only 227 copies of the original album exist, but an early '90s version issued by bootleggers Remote Control is a lot more common, although much to Mundy's fury, it includes not only an extra track on which the bootlegger goes public by adding his own band to the program, but sports a different sleeve, too.

ALAP: **Gary approached you regarding his *Neuengamme* compilation looking for a Whitehouse submission. Have you any recollections on this?**

WILLIAM BENNETT (WHITEHOUSE): **I honestly recall nothing at all regarding this.**

ALAP: **Was it through your time with Whitehouse that you made the connection to Broken Flag? How did that come about?**

JOHN MURPHY (KRANG): **Yes, that would most likely be the case. My memory after 25 years is a little faulty in regards to this, but I seem to remember that I had originally met Gary Mundy, probably early on in the last half of 1982, at one of Whitehouse's 'Live Aktions' in or around London. He would have been one of the twenty or so regulars at the time that came to see Whitehouse live performances. It was also around this approximate time that I met and became friendly with Philip Best of Consumer Electronics, originally meeting through Whitehouse performances. I recall that Gary asked me towards the end of 1982 to contribute a Krang Music track to the *Neuengamme* album, which I soon after recorded rather primitively by myself in the basement of the Islington squat I occupied in late November 1982. I also did a number of other Krang recordings around this time with varying degrees of satisfaction.**

ALAP: **Krang underwent many slight name changes across the years. What's the reason behind this?**

JM: **Difficult to say properly, but probably something to do with my personality, which gets easily bored and restless. Perhaps I have undiagnosed adult attention deficit disorder, who knows? Kraang, its current name, was originally known as Krang Music in the early eighties. I was never entirely happy with that name, but stuck with it for some years before eventually moving more into intense dark ambient areas and using the name My Father of Serpents, and then Ophiolateria. The name Krang Music caused a little confusion back in my home country of Australia in the early nineties, when I occasionally 'came up for air' at various live events, as there also happened to be a local electro-dance outfit called Krang in Sydney.**

ALAP: **How did you become aware of Broken Flag?**

KEVIN TOMKINS (SUTCLIFFE JUGEND): **Through Come Organisation. I think William Bennett was approached by Gary Mundy to contribute a Whitehouse track for a compilation, and he sent a Sutcliffe Jugend one as well. After that, I think Gary and I made contact directly, but this only lasted a year or two.**

ALAP: **How do you view the *Neuengamme* record now? Any thoughts on that compilation or, indeed, the *Axis Sally* tape compilation that Sutcliffe also appeared on?**

KT: **I don't remember *Axis Sally*. I can only give my opinion on *Neuengamme* as I felt back then when it came out, as I don't have an opinion on it now. I remember being happy with our track and quite liking P16.D4. Whitehouse's Live Aktion contribution was spoiled by Glen Michael Wallis' synth wanking, but Bennett's vocals were excellent. Consumer Electronics' contribution was frankly poor, although I know he only had limited means at the time. Ramleh were Ramleh, okay-ish, but I preferred the direct clear strong vocalist style, and still do, and the rest was of no interest to me. I know I didn't like the cover very much. Having said that, it was Sutcliffe Jugend's first appearance on vinyl, so it was significant to me in that way. Also, Broken Flag were the only viable alternative to Come Organisation for PE, Noise and extreme releases in the early eighties. These are my opinions as they were then, not now; they might be completely different if I listened to it again. As you may have guessed, I'm not a great consumer of the genre; like any other genre, the ratio of good/bad artists is poor enough to keep me being any kind of 'genre fan' or completist. Whitehouse are the only other artists involved whom I consider to have done anything of note beyond, or even on, the compilation. So, I guess you could say my opinion was almost that of an outsider?**

JOHN MURPHY: **As I haven't heard it for some years, it is difficult to say, but I seem to remember that it sounded like quite an impressively rounded compilation of harsh power electronics from a selection of artists. Some of the aesthetics, imagery, and lyrical aspects have possibly not stood the tests of time, and over the last 25 years have become more than a little clichéd, due mostly to too many mining the same artistic shaft over the past two decades, but for the time, it was relevant, exciting, innovative, and it worked.**

ALAP: ***Neuengamme* was a very lengthy album. Do you feel it suffered sound quality-wise because of that fact? Didn't you have to snip a few bits before you released it?**

GARY MUNDY: **I never had a problem with the quality of it. Almost all of the tracks were submitted on cassettes and then transferred to vinyl. P16.D4's track was an exception, as they had recorded their track very carefully and were a little upset that they were put up against a bunch of overloaded cassette recordings, as it made their track sound quieter. I loved their track, though, and thought the whole album worked well. I didn't cut any of the tracks down in length, but I did remove that track by 400 Blows as I mentioned earlier.**

ALAP: **Maybe wise considering what they went on to do?**

GM: **They lived near me and we met up and agreed that they would be on the record, but eventually we needed to lose a track and their track didn't really fit in, being a kind of mutant funk thing. It was good, but just not right for the record. They weren't pleased, to say the least, yet another one where I can say, "...and I never spoke to them again." I always think of myself as easy-going but I've lost a lot of friends along the way, so I must be some kind of bastard, I guess?**

ALAP: **The bootleg version of that album caused a bit of upset, right?**

GM: **We all get annoyed when our stuff is bootlegged, but I'm sure I'm not alone in being secretly flattered, and I have bought plenty of bootlegs myself, so I won't be a hypocrite. My problem with *Neuengamme* is that the bootleggers committed the outrageous sin of adding a totally fucking abysmal extra track that had nothing to do with the mood or concept of the original album. If you bootleg an album you don't alter it, for christ's sake. I knew the people responsible, and one of the guys responsible had the nerve to order quite a large amount of material from me shortly after, and as he did not have the decency to admit the fraud, I kept the idiot's money and sent him nothing. I believe in justice.**

BF11 / BFV2 - RAMLEH / LIBERTARIAN RECORDINGS, A Return To Slavery

Another benchmark record of early Power Electronics and, like all of the vinyl products that followed, it's an edition of 500 copies. The front cover caused a minor stir when Rough Trade, then one of the U.K.'s largest record distributors, refused to carry the record because of the autopsy photograph used. (Truth be told, they were more concerned about the exposed penis than the corpse.) The second side was titled Slaughter At Random and was credited to Libertarian Recordings, although it was actually a Consumer Electronics set caught in London during June 1982. This live set later turned up on the CE box set released by RRRecords, but lacked the bite of the original pressing.

ALAP: **With Ramleh being, in effect, a song-based band, how much work went into rehearsals for the material? What was the process of taking the songs from the bedroom into the studio like?**

GARY MUNDY: **With the early work, we worked the ideas for the home sessions and recorded when we felt that it was working, but for the studio sessions we tried out some ideas at home and then expanded on them in the studio.**

ALAP: **How come Philip ended up as Libertarian Recordings on the other side of the album? Was it to do with a contract with Whitehouse?**

GM: **We discussed a joint album and he decided that he wanted his side to be a remixed live Consumer Electronics show but under the name Libertarian Recordings. Nothing to do with Whitehouse, but the name change may have been.**

BF8 - VARIOUS, Axis Sally
BF10 - VARIOUS, Crusade

Not having the financial backing necessary to produce as many records as he would've wished, and on the strength of amassing so many quality recordings that would otherwise have not seen the light of day, Mundy constantly released compilation cassettes, mostly based around certain themes, throughout the label's early years. Aside from the more well-known projects, such smaller and under-appreciated names as Laxative Souls (LXSS), Pacific 231, and FâLX çèrêbRi from mainland Europe, and hardworking networkers such as the Croiners from the U.S.A. mixed with the regular Broken Flag connections like The New Blockaders, Uncommunity and Mauthausen Orchestra, as well as 'unknowns' from the U.K. such as Assailer, Sir Ashleigh Grove, Citipati, and C.F.C. were dropped into the compilations, giving them an extensive aesthetic reach throughout the musical styles that motivated the label. Cassette versions of the three vinyl compilations were also issued.

ALAP: **Compilations went onto become a common feature in the Broken Flag catalogue. Why was this, just as a documentation of your contacts and interests at the relevant time?**

GARY MUNDY: **I didn't have the time or resources to release full tapes or records by everyone. Sometimes I only liked a couple of tracks, so that was a factor, too. It was good to get as many decent artists as possible on the label in some way. I also enjoyed compiling them and I tried to make them more than just a bunch of tracks thrown together. They were usually themed and I often added my own links between tracks or got somebody else to do that, like John Duncan with the *Morality* tape. I tried not to include tracks I didn't like, although with closer friends it was harder to turn things down. There are only a handful of tracks throughout the catalogue that aren't that great, though, and I think the 'hit' rate was quite high.**

BF9 - ROCKWELL, Hate
BF12 - THE FUTURE CALLS (Soundtrack)
BF13 - SWASTIKA COMMAND (Soundtrack)
BF19 - ZOO ZINGT DE NSB (Soundtrack)
BF26 - THE PARTY DAY OF POWER (Soundtrack)

Broken Flag released a series of cassettes which Mundy advertised as 'Soundtracks.' These all featured obscure material relating to the Third Reich and various far-right political movements from within the U.K., the exception being the Rockwell cassette, which was a speech given by George Lincoln Rockwell, the American author of the notorious book *White Power*. Ramleh anonymously supplied the electronic backing.

ALAP: **How did you come up with the 'Soundtracks' concept?**

GARY MUNDY: **I was given a couple of cassettes and was curious to go to the shop where they came from. It was some kind of far-right bookshop next door to the big gay club Heaven, bizarrely enough; there was some really dodgy stuff in there. I bought some of the more controversial items out of curiosity, really. As soon as I had heard the tapes, I thought it would be great to mix these recordings of speeches, etc. with the music we were creating, partly because I knew it would sound great and partly because I knew it would piss people off. It was a very brief phase, but the label is still known and condemned for it. I stand by some of it.**

Certainly, the Rockwell tape works brilliantly with the Ramleh backing. Releasing a couple of tapes just as they were was probably a mistake, though, although I don't recall any specific complaints at the time. That came much later on, really, but even then not too much.

ALAP: **Out of all those soundtrack cassettes, and apart from the Rockwell one, it's only really *The Future Calls* that features any electronic music. Why did you opt to make that for sale 'to regulars only' back then? It's only the room recording of what sounds like a National Front (8) meeting in the upstairs room of a pub.**

GM: **I'm not sure why that one wasn't released officially — possibly something to do with not wanting to cause trouble for the person who supplied me with the tape, but more likely wanting to make sure that anyone interested knew exactly what they were getting before they paid for it. I went through a phase of liking the soundtrack tapes idea but I got bored with it after a while and just wanted to make more music of my own.**

BF14 - SWASTIKA KOMMANDO, Mental Answer
BF22 - SWASTIKA KOMMANDO, Der Arbeiter
BF32 - SWASTIKA KOMMANDO, Judgment

The strange saga of Pietro Mazzochin is, as we speak, disappearing with the sands of time. Little was known of him in the first place, save for his initial contact with Gary Mundy, his three tape recordings of Power Electronics nastiness in a style thoroughly within the emerging Italian PE 'tradition' for Broken Flag (followed by a tape on Recloose Org under the name Observation Clinique and a couple of other low-key appearances), and his subsequent drop off the face of the earth. Theories abound and are often larger than life, the strangest being that Mazzochin had a religious conversion and became a Catholic missionary, after which he was captured by natives in Africa while on a mission and killed. Whether there is even a grain of truth to this story is irrelevant to the fact that, for now, the speculation continues without the benefit of Mr. Mazzochin's testimony which is, like his person, missing without a trace.

ALAP: **What do you recall about your dealings with Swastika Kommando's Pietro Mazzochin?**

GARY MUNDY: **We had a fair amount of communication at the time, but mostly just about music. Like most of the Broken Flag artists, I never met him or spoke to him as everything was done by post in those days. I loved Maurizio Bianchi's work at that time and when Pietro came along with his music, which was like the more brutal end of Maurizio's work, I was really excited and wanted him on the label.**

ALAP: **I'm guessing he swiped the project's name from the *Swastika Command* soundtrack cassette you issued.**

GM: **Right. It was always going to be a difficult sell with a name like that, but he was determined that that's how he wanted to present the music. People think it was my idea, but it really wasn't. I think a group of us had arrived at a similar place simultaneously. It seemed there was something in the air and it felt right to go there at that time. It's hard to put yourself back into the thoughts you had at the time, but I believed very much in trying not to question the artistic choices of my artists, and similarly, mine weren't challenged either. We all trusted that our hearts were in the right place.**

ALAP: **How do you view those three cassettes he did now?**

GM: **I still like the music I released by other artists at that time, and I'm very surprised at how little rubbish got through my 'quality control.' It was a real shame we couldn't find Pietro for the Broken Flag box set, as I would have definitely had a whole side of his work.**

ALAP: **Did he supply you with any other material than that which you released?**

GM: **No, I think I put out everything that he ever sent me. I have no recollection of him ever sending me something that I didn't like.**

BF20 - RAMLEH, Live New Force

July 1st, 1983 — This cassette featured a live recording from the infamous Roebuck show. This pub in central London played host to a Whitehouse aktion, with Ramleh as one of the supports. After a few incidents, including beer glass-throwing, the show was subjected to a police raid and a few arrests were made...

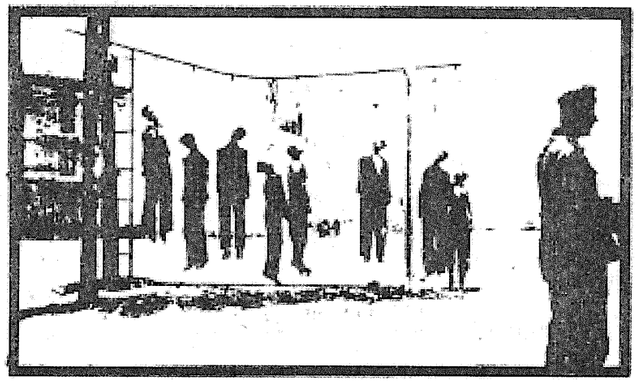
(8) National Front: A right-wing political movement that had a penchant for attempting to recruit members at football matches and rock gigs. The attraction of violence earned them as many members as the party's politics did.

Broken Flag presents :

RAMLEH

live at the

ROEBUCK



1st July 7-30

support for WHITEHOUSE

A COME ORG EVENT

ALAP: **Can you tell me the rundown of events as you recall them regarding that gig at The Roebuck?**

GARY MUNDY: **Philip organised that one. He had sold it to the landlord of the pub as a Country & Western evening, I think. I sorted the PA for the night. Ramleh played first without any problems. It was a good performance from us that night too, probably the best of those early shows. When Whitehouse played they were in a fairly aggressive mood and, I think, a glass was thrown into the audience and hit Steve Stapleton, who then got up onto the stage and smashed some equipment. Missiles started to fly and a beer glass flew out of the upstairs window onto Tottenham Court Road below, and the police were called, but were prevented from entering the room by a few members of the audience. When they eventually got in, they were angry and arrested a few people at random. All the bands got away, but the soundman was arrested, along with some of the audience. He called me up from jail and he wasn't too happy. Philip nearly got attacked by the landlord, who was furious. The pub shut down shortly afterwards and I'm not sure if there was a connection.**

ALAP: **What did the PA guy have to say?**

GM: **He shouted at me, down the phone, about misleading him and how some of his gear was broken. I agreed to send him some money for his troubles but, obviously, never worked with him again.**

ALAP: **Was this the first Whitehouse show that you witnessed any trouble at?**

GM: **I suppose so. I saw them at The Greyhound over in Fulham in front of an Anarcho-punk audience who weren't too impressed, but there wasn't any real trouble. It all sparked off from that night at The Roebuck.**

ALAP: **What were your recollections of that show at The Roebuck pub?**

WILLIAM BENNETT: **I don't even recall [Ramleh] being at The Roebuck at all. I just remember Gary Levermore and Glen Wallis's 'Bushido' — I think they were called — being there and Steve Stapleton was in the audience firing things up.**

BF24 - RAMLEH, Live Phenol

July 11th, 1983 — another London show and, again, as support to Whitehouse.

ALAP: **How did the show at The Clarendon Hotel come about? Surely it wasn't in the main room?**

GARY MUNDY: **It was downstairs in the smaller venue. I think William arranged that one?**

ALAP: **Yeah, that's what I figured. That upstairs room could hold 400 plus. What kind of crowd did you guys pull? I saw The Mob** (9) **play there, over that summer, to a half-empty room.**

GM: **It would have been between 50 and 100, I suppose. The Roebuck show seemed busier, but it was a smaller room, so it was probably about the same.**

ALAP: **Any thoughts on the type of audience you used to attract then? A big crossover of Psychic TV types and the bleaker end of the 'positive punk' crowd.**

GM: **I was still in that whole hating the audience phase then, so I didn't really care who they were or if they came at all, really, but it was mostly Psychic TV fans and people wearing various bits of army clothing, and many with severe haircuts. I never went down the fashion road with the whole scene, but most of the audience did, and Jerome, too. I never felt the need to do that. I was quite happy doing my own thing.**

ALAP: **Why did you opt to edit Philip's conversation with the venue's soundman out of the cassette release?**

GM: **At the time, I was pretty pissed off with Philip about that and decided that it didn't make anyone look good to leave it on there. Philip can be heard attempting to sabotage our sound by asking the soundman to lower the volume so that Whitehouse will sound more impressive when they play. As it turned out, the guy didn't do too much to our sound, but when Whitehouse came on he left their volume really low and it became impossible for the show to continue. With hindsight it all seemed pretty funny so I opted to include the full-length recording with Philip's discussion on the *Awake!* set for both completeness and the humour angle.**

ALAP: **Why did you produce two covers for the BF24 release of that set?**

GM: **Did we? I don't recall that. Maybe we came up with something we preferred later on. A lot of the early tapes had different covers before Jerome redesigned them. The rare ones are those that didn't have what is thought of as the 'Broken Flag style.' They came later, after *A Return To Slavery* came out.**

ALAP: **So Jerome was responsible for that Broken Flag 'look'? How important was it to you to have a distinctive style with regards to the look of your releases?**

GM: **Jerome and I had decided on the *A Return To Slavery* sleeve, and then Jerome suggested using that look as a style for all of the releases, and he then redesigned all of the earlier tapes in that style. The original tape covers were designed by me, but there's no overall look to them, so Jerome brought that to Broken Flag.**

ALAP: **You seemed to settle on the black bordering and Marine Blue card over time. Why opt for that look?**

GM: **We just liked the look of the black and white image on a white background with a black border. It just looked right to us. Later when Jerome left, I started to print the covers onto blue card. I used it as a one-off look for one release as I recall, and liked it so much that I decided to go with it from there on, so there's three eras of covers: the original sleeves, the black and white ones, and then the blue ones.**

ALAP: **Back to the Nazi imagery. It was presented without any explanation or apology on your artwork and as such was totally open to misinterpretation. There must have been, at some level, the thought that people might find it provocative? I know we still had punks walking up and down the Kings Road** (10) **trying to upset the Chelsea pensioners** (11) **by wearing swastika armbands, but your artwork seemed a little more sinister, maybe because it was so ambiguous.**

GM: **I liked the ambiguity, and I didn't want it to be obvious whether it was pro- or anti- Nazi, or whether it was ironic or not. I was certainly OK with the idea that it might cause offence at the time, although I think when you listen to a lot of the stuff it's fairly obvious that it's not pro-Nazi. It never really occurred to me that it would attract real neo-Nazis, and strangely, it didn't, which in hindsight is something of a relief. I think it was so extreme that it was assumed that it couldn't be for real and we were mostly left alone. You also have to remember that we were teenagers going through that arrogant, invincible stage that, I think, most people go through at that age.**

ALAP: **Do you feel the general political climate of the time had an indirect effect on you? I'm thinking about the surge of left-wing politics in popular music that emerged during the miner's strike period** (12)**, things like Save the GLC, Red Wedge** (13)**, etc. After a couple of years (1982-1983) which pretty much ignored the Falklands hysteria** (14) **and Thatcher's re-election, it seemed politics had entered music again in a big way. Any thoughts on that?**

GM: **My personal outlook at the time was a kind of weird amalgam of anarchism, libertarianism and a warped kind of socialism then. I sympthised with some of what was being done at the time but it was all so negative and humourless, and a lot of people involved in those left-wing organisations were such wankers, it became difficult to want to associate with them. They seemed to be advocating a really grim future where everyone was equal but everyone was fucking miserable also. Part of what I did was definitely intended to piss those people off. Some of what I did went against my personal beliefs, but it was worth it just to try and shake them up. Unless you were there it's difficult to explain. The comedian Alexei Sayle once said that when you told a joke, there would be a pause while people analysed what you had said before deciding whether it was appropriate to laugh, and I think there's a lot of truth in that. That said, yes the Falklands was a pathetic war, yes, Thatcher was a cunt, but no way were the youth at large going to support Red Wedge, with its Soviet grimness. I felt the only way forward was what I saw as a real kind of punk ideal of embracing everything and making personal decisions about what you wanted and being true to yourself and not joining tribes. Very few of us took that message from punk but I did and, to a large extent, still do. I've never understood party politics. My views are a mixture of bits of most parties ideas with a few of my own thrown in for good measure. The idea that a large group of people can always agree on every issue is insane. It goes against human nature.**

ALAP: **I'm also thinking that when you stopped using that kind of imagery it was because of the indirect effect of what was going on at that time. Or did you simply just 'grow up'?**

GM: **Growing up had a lot to do with it. I was 21 at the time and started to realise that the people who were listening got what we were doing anyway and the ones we wanted to annoy weren't really paying attention, which made the whole thing felt a little pointless. I was getting far more interested in what I would call personal politics and started to see the earlier stuff as serving no further purpose.**

A little later, the crushing of the miner's strike pretty much destroyed the ultra-left in this country, and the parties' policies began to merge into the indistinguishable nature of today. Politics began to drop out of music I suppose. I was also making less extreme sounding music, still very experimental but not as violent, so whereas the imagery fitted the early music, it no longer fitted what I was doing. I think I was a bit embarrassed by some of the early stuff at the time as well, as I had found a new direction and felt the old music might hold me back. Now, many years on, I can look back and see it more clearly as naive youthful enthusiasm and arrogance, but for a while, I wanted to get as far away from it as possible.

ALAP: **Do you feel that, perhaps and more so in retrospect, that Ramleh were tainted by what Mark Smith called "McCarthyism in reverse"?**

GM: **The music press were terrified back then of being seen to support anything with the remotest right-wing connection, and found those connections many times where they didn't really exist, so to be blatantly using the kind of imagery that we used was bound to get us banned by those people, regardless of our motives, as they couldn't be seen to be taking a chance with us.**

ALAP: **Do you think there's still an element of that today?**

GM: **I don't think the press is quite that paranoid today, but it still does exist to an extent.**

BF25 - RAMLEH, Live Prossneck

The fourth Ramleh performance was carried out on the Saturday afternoon of October 1st and was held at a small rehearsal room in the Camden area of London. The directions given on the show flyer stated, "Last door on the left, alleyway opposite 'blind alley.' Chalk Farm end of Camden High Street," but proved difficult to follow for most who had wanted to attend. The abrupt end to the *Prossneck* cassette came about because the tape machine recording the show was knocked over by Mundy during the performance.

ALAP: **Can you tell me a little about the show at the Atlanta rehearsal rooms? Seems an odd thing to do considering the amount of venues around London back then.**

GM: **We wanted to do a show that was totally under our control and the idea came up of the rehearsal room. We thought that we could rehearse there in the morning, get the sound just right, and then perform in the afternoon. It was a Saturday afternoon in a busy shopping area up in Chalk Farm, so it was easy for people to get to. The room was in a different building from the office, so we thought we could get away with doing an illegal concert there. It worked brilliantly except that a few people didn't make it as the directions (on the flyer) were a bit hard to follow. It felt special, like a real event. The sound was superb and we were completely in control. No support acts, no venue staff, no soundman. It was all down to us and it was my favorite show of those we did.**

(9) The Mob: London-based Anarcho-punk-cum-hippy band with releases on their own All The Madmen records as well as Crass Records. All The Madmen were responsible for releasing the 'Rape' 7-inch by Zos Kia, still one of the most harrowing post-Industrial records to date.

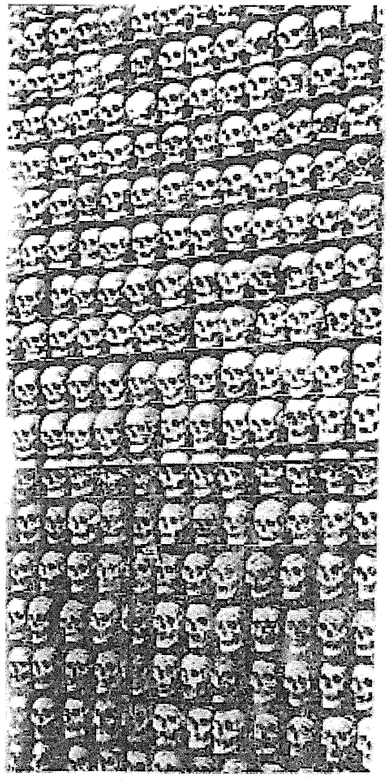
(10) Kings Road: A popular haunt in Chelsea, south London, for punks of the bondage trouser and crazy-colour dyed hair variety.

(11) Chelsea Pensioners: Retired soldiers who hang around the Kings Road and watch the world go by.

(12) The National Coal Miners strike of 1984-85: One of the most defining moments in British politics. The industrial dispute caused deep divisions within society, and not only amongst regions and class but also families. The effects are still being felt today throughout some communities. The strikers' defeat at the hands of the Conservative government effectively crushed the trade union movement within the U.K.

(13) Red Wedge: An organisation put together by musicians such as Billy Bragg and Paul Weller, along with a few 'champagne socialist' politicians that aimed to reconnect youth with left-wing politics at a 'street level.' Political causes were never in short supply throughout the early to mid-'80s, and 'Save The GLC' [Greater London Council] was another. Let's not even talk about Live Aid.

(14) Falklands: A 74-day war between Britain and Argentina that started in April 1982 over a long-running sovereignty dispute about the islands. Believed by many to have been started to distract from events closer to home and also to ensure the Conservative party a second term in government office on the back of patriotic jingoism.

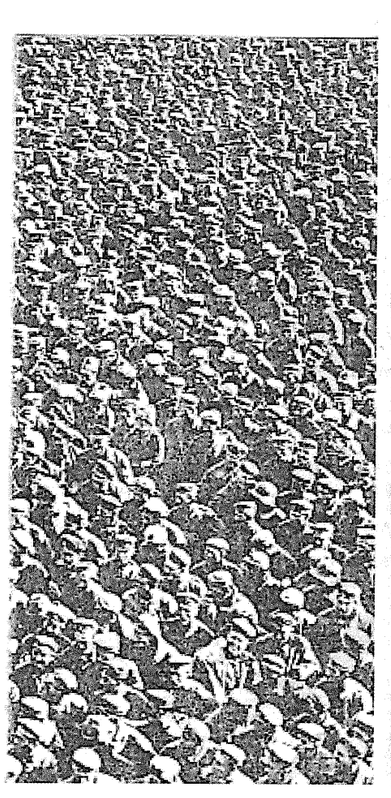


a broken flag presentation

RAMLEH

PLAY LIVE IN CAMDEN

tickets in advance 50p - produktion/broken flag



1ST OCTOBER 3·30PM

last door on the left

alleyway opposite "blind alley"

chalk farm end of camden high street

BF16 - MAUTHAUSEN ORCHESTRA, Mauthausen Orchestra
BF23 - MAUTHAUSEN ORCHESTRA, Conflict

It is in no small part due to the pioneering work of Pierpaolo Zoppo as Mauthausen Orchestra that the words 'Italian' and 'filth' join so seamlessly these days. Although Zoppo began releasing tapes soon after Maurizio Bianchi initial MB recordings, there was a noticeable shift in tone and approach between the two men. While Bianchi mournful obsession with the seamier side of life was obviously framed as a cause for concern, Mauthausen Orchestra happily wallowed in filthy sex, crime, and all manner of perversion — a ideological split similar to the divide between Throbbing Gristle's 'reportage' of the world's ills and Whitehouse's gleeful declaration that they "now go all the way!".

Not only were the earliest tapes more unabashedly raw in presentation than M.B. (with names like *Necrofellatio*, *Murderfuck*, and *Anal Perversions*), but the sonics were driven by a lo-tech, anti-fidelity atmosphere that melded smoothly with the Broken Flag aesthetic. Proof of the project's enduring influence on modern-day Power Electronics and Noise practitioners can be found everywhere in the world — U.S. PE stalwart Mark Solotroff named his long-running project Bloodyminded after a Mauthausen cassette, while an early 'best-of' LP was released on Japan's Vis-à-vis Audio Arts label by Juntaro Yamanouchi of the Gerogerigegege — and recent vinyl reissues on the Trash Ritual label have kept Zoppo's early audio filth front and center in the minds of a new generation.

ALAP: **When did you become aware of the Broken Flag label?**

PIERPAOLO ZOPPO (MAUTHAUSEN ORCHESTRA): **In the post-Punk period, I heard the music of MB, Ramleh, Whitehouse, and Nurse With Wound and I was both intrigued and impressed. My reaction to it was immediate.**

The first recordings were made in 1981 and over a five year span, the Mauthausen Orchestra produced twelve official tapes, and all were distributed through the cult label Aquilifer Sodality. By the time of my early recordings, I decided to send Gary Mundy a copy of the *Conflict* cassette. I already knew the label for their interesting experimental, noise, and electronics during 1982.

ALAP: **How do you feel about those early releases now?**

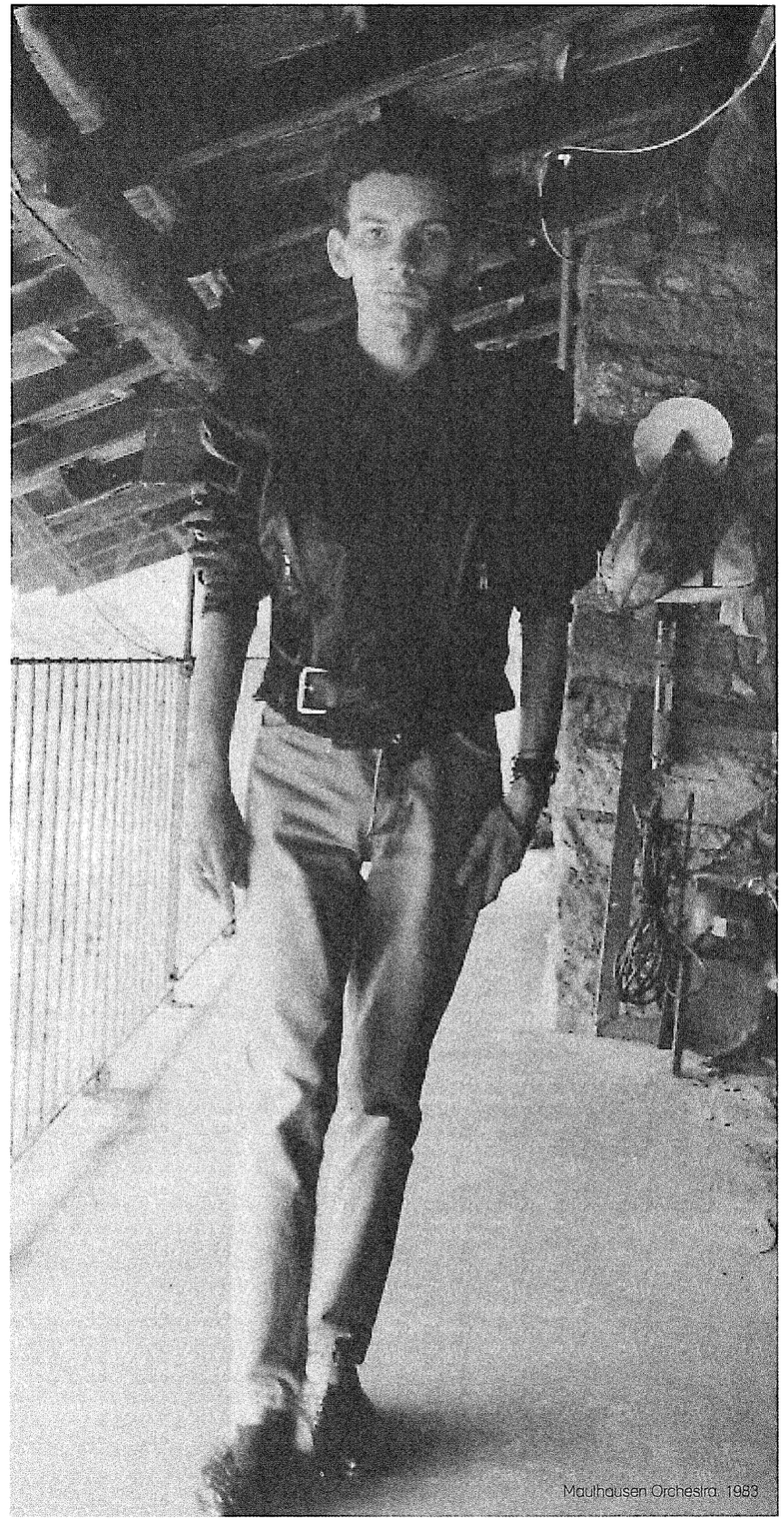
PZ: **I think those early recordings to be of an extreme, provoking, and resolutory pleasure with a precise and recognizable identity and pure sensorial effect.**

ALAP: **Could you tell me about your dealings with Mauthausen Orchestra?**

GARY MUNDY: **Pierpaolo was one of the many Italian soundworkers at the time who mailed me a tape of his music and I just loved it. We were in regular correspondence for years and then drifted apart.**

ALAP: **I understand you only did the one live performance back then?**

PIERPAOLO ZOPPO: **There was only the one live show, in maybe '83 or '84, a rather private one which took place in Modena, Italy. For that sixty-minute performance, the line-up was me with Andrea Cernotto (The Sodality) and Pietro Mazzochin (Swastika Kommando).**



Mauthausen Orchestra: 1983

BF17 / BFV3 - MB, The Plain Truth

After spending a few years as a music journalist, Maurizio Bianchi started to produce his own music, firstly under the Sacher-Pelz moniker, then under his own name, or simply abbreviated to MB. His compositions were mostly based around side-long suites created with synths and motivated by the likes of Conrad Schnitzler and Tangerine Dream, but the series of ten albums he released throughout the early '80s successfully washed all of the colour out from the influences that those names might suggest. He also had two albums released under the name Leibstandarte SS MB by the Come Organisation label, but stopped working with the label once he found out that William Bennett had laid Hitler speeches over the top of the music and released it without any consultation. *The Plain Truth* album, with its 500 copy run, stands as a highpoint in MB's early career. After a lengthy hiatus, Bianchi returned to music in 1998 and hasn't stopped since.

ALAP: **How did the contact with Maurizio Bianchi come about? You were obviously aware of his earlier records?**

GARY MUNDY: **I had been aware of *Symphony for a Genocide* and I got a couple of his albums through the Come Organisation. I got a hold of his address and wrote to him, and he wrote back with details of all his other records. I bought them all from him, got to release some of his music on Broken Flag, and corresponded with him regularly for several years. I thought his records were astounding. *Morder Unter Uns* really got to me the first time I heard it as, of course, did the *Symphony for a Genocide* album.**

ALAP: **What were your thoughts when you first heard *The Plain Truth*?**

GM: **Obviously it was a surprise in that it was a more mellow-sounding record, but I thought it was perfect, and I was glad to release a different-sounding MB record.**

ALAP: **Were you aware that you would be getting a much more mellow MB recording for release consideration, and was there much discussion beforehand about the record?**

GM: **He didn't mention it in advance, although I knew about his conversion. So I was expecting that it might be different, but I trusted him to make great music, and he did.**

ALAP: **The image used for the cover of *The Plain Truth* was a colourful contrast to the bleaker outlook presented by the covers on your previous releases. How did this cover concept come about?**

MAURIZIO BIANCHI: **At that time, I was really involved in a personal, spiritual framework, and both pictures, front and back, were focused on an abstract view of the Holy Invisible, but with some material disinfection.**

ALAP: **How much talking 'round did it take for you to agree to publish the album with a full-colour sleeve?**

GARY MUNDY: **Very little. He used to send me these Polaroid photographs with his letters. I always liked them, and when he suggested blowing up two of them for the sleeve, it seemed like a good idea. The downside of that sleeve is that I prepared a rough copy for the printers, using Letraset** (15) **to show them what I wanted. They simply copied what I had done rather than typesetting it properly, which is why the lettering is a little wonky. Nobody seemed to mind except me.**

ALAP: **It's a record that I still consider very uplifting, but how do you feel about this release now?**

MAURIZIO BIANCHI: **I think that it's my first approach to spirituality, and I remember that a friend of mine, Edgardo Cellerino, lent me an instrument that I only used the once on my records — a keyboard with violin and cello sounds — and he waited sitting in the living room at my home on a Sunday morning until I finished recording the whole album.**

ALAP: **Did your knowledge of his Jevovah's Witness beliefs cause any conflict with your own politics?**

GARY MUNDY: **I'm not a religious person at all, but I like encountering people with strong beliefs to see if I can understand what makes an intelligent person believe deeply in something with no proof, and so far, I haven't worked it out. Maurizio spoke to me about it a fair bit, but he didn't try to put any pressure on me to try and see things his way. I respected him and was pleased for him that he had found something that positive in his life, but it certainly wasn't for me.**

BF18A - MB, Symphony for a Genocide
BF18B - MB, S.F.A.G. 81

ALAP: **That S.F.A.G. 81 release is very much a source of confusion for some people, what with the various pressings and mixes, etc. You released it as a cassette first, prior to Nigel Ayers' Sterile Records producing the vinyl version, and then Gary did the double-cassette version. Can you set the record straight for us ?**

MAURIZIO BIANCHI: **Yes, I remember that my early recording was the original *Symphony for a Genocide*, edited on Sterile Records because I sent the master to Nigel on a reel-to-reel tape, and sometime after, maybe a year and a half, I made a remix of the original using an echo-machine and other special effects and that became the S.F.A.G. 81 work for a cassette tape. I sent the cassette out to some friends and I know that after some years it became an album released for a Czech label, but I don't recall the name.**

ALAP: **You also released the cassette version of the *Symphony* album backed with the *S.F.A.G.* remixes. Why?**

GARY MUNDY: **Maurizio wanted to release the remixes and he knew that I loved the original album, but it was my idea to do the double tape with that original version. It was long deleted and I wanted it heard.**

ALAP: ***Symphony for a Genocide* is considered to be one of the most respected and influential of the MB works. How do you think it compares, if at all, to the other works in your discography, or do you think each release stands alone ?**

MAURIZIO BIANCHI: **There is not any comparison but just the awareness to have created something sole.**

ALAP: **What do you feel is the major difference between your older works and the newer ones, from *Colori* onwards?**

MB: **The major difference is just the positivity. The older works were permeated by negativity and despair whilst the newer ones have as a base optimism.**

BF28 - RAMLEH, Live at Morden Tower
BF33 - RAMLEH, Live at Morden Tower

The fifth Ramleh live appearance took place on October 12th, 1983, and was held at the Morden Tower, actually an old part of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne's city wall. The event was organised by Richard Rupenus and featured The New Blockaders and Whitehouse. It was the only Ramleh appearance outside of London. Broken Flag later released two very different recordings of the same show.

ALAP: **The line-up for this show was quite a noise-boy's wet dream. What was the reality?**

GARY MUNDY: **At the time, there wasn't as much interest in the bands as there was later on, so there weren't huge amounts of people there, but it was still great to have these three bands together for this one time. I think Sir Ashleigh Grove played too. We played with Whitehouse again recently, but sadly, The New Blockaders have retired from live performance so we couldn't recreate that lineup.**

ALAP: **What do you remember about that TNB performance?**

GM: **I can remember enjoying the performance, but with the passing of time, I can't remember much about it. I think we played before them and Whitehouse played last. Jerome and I had to get back to London, so we wanted to play first and leave early. I think we left in the middle of the Whitehouse set, and stumbled off a train into London in the early hours of the following morning.**

ALAP: **Wasn't there some violent outburst during the Whitehouse set?**

GM: **People seem to remember this differently. My memory is that William Bennett was performing one song and shouting the words right into the face of a girl in the audience, and then slapped her across the face. I don't know what prompted him to do that, but she was with some friends and they all got up in protest and there was a bit of a fight, after which most of the audience left and Whitehouse continued regardless.**

ALAP: **So there's no truth in the rumour that you all split across town to catch a gig by The Alarm** (16)**?**

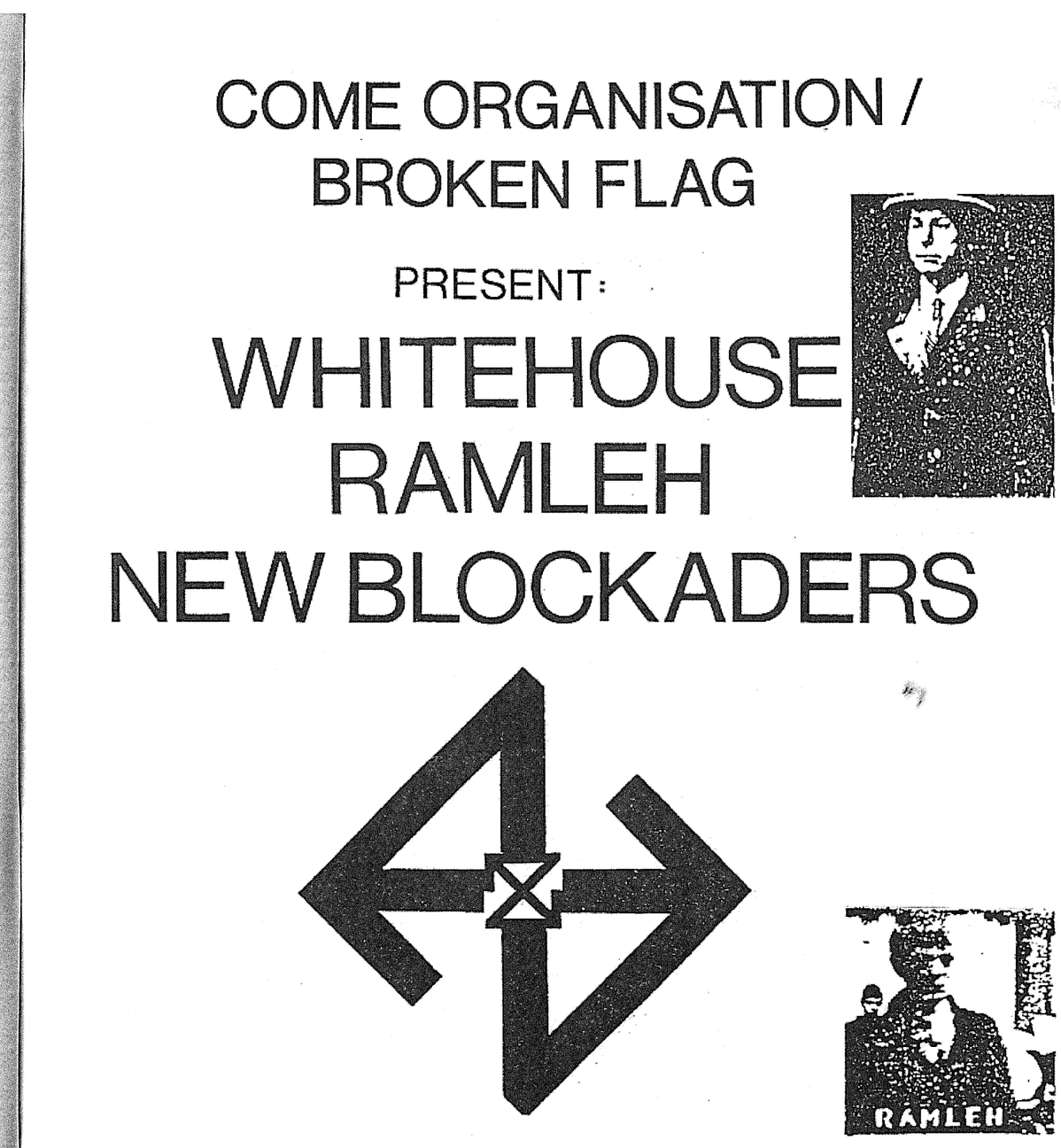
GM: **The others probably did. I'm sure they were all huge Alarm fans. As I said, we had to get home, so we missed out.**

ALAP: **You fell out with Bennett around this time over the allegations concerning the theft of the Come Org's Super 8 video equipment. Can you tell us about this?**

GM: **Actually, I think that was before the Newcastle show. William had all his video equipment stolen and the description of the two people seen running away supposedly matched me and a friend, so he reported us to the police. Obviously, I was fucked off about this, as I thought of William as a friend at that point, but you learn, I suppose. We didn't see each other for about 24 years after that Morden Tower show, but I saw him recently and it was all quite civil. It all seems pretty trivial now.**

ALAP: **What did the police have to say?**

GM: **They were pretty pissed off because they got a warrant to search the Broken Flag address, which, at the time, was a flat where Debbie Thomas lived. I was actually living in a house a few miles away with Philip Best and a couple of other friends. Debbie**



sent the police to my parent's house, and obviously I wasn't there either. So by the time they arrived at mine, they weren't too happy. They asked to see my room which was of course full with musical equipment, amplifiers, keyboards, etc. "Like electrical equipment, do we?" one of them asked. It must have looked pretty suspicious. Also, before he told me why they were there, he asked if I knew anyone in Muswell Hill, and as this was about the time of the Dennis Nilsen killings (17), I started to get a little worried.

ALAP: **Why opt to release two versions of the Morden Tower show?**

GM: **I always recorded our shows and released them. After putting out the recordings as BF28, someone sent me their own recording of the show, I forget who but possibly Richard. It was a better recording than mine, so I released it as BF33. Listening back recently, I like both versions for different reasons.**

Vortex Campaign. 1983

BF21 - VARIOUS, Le Couperet

ALAP: **The *Le Couperet* compilation seems to be the work of Richard Rupenus. But, I suspect, the Dr. Petiot (18) angle was yours?**

GARY MUNDY: **Afraid so. I was interested in his story at the time and used it as a way to link the compilation together. Richard helped a lot with getting the musical contributions together.**

ALAP: **How did your contact with TNB come about?**

JAN VERSTRAETE (VORTEX CAMPAIGN): **At the end of the seventies there was a very good record shop in Gent, which was half an hour's train ride from where I lived. They had a small experimental section and there, I picked up the goodies like Nurse With Wound's *Merzblid Schwet*, Whitehouse's *Birthdeath Experience*, and Bladder Flask's *One Day I Was So Sad*... On the LP covers, you found the addresses of the artists and I just wrote to them. That's how I contacted Richard Rupenus, who had also released cassettes as Funeral Dance Party if I'm correct. I found out about them in the DIY cassette reviews in the NME (19). The deal was that you sent a blank tape with some international reply coupons (20) to cover postage costs. The artist recorded the material on the tape, added the artwork, and sent it back. I asked Richard for more Funeral Dance Party stuff, but he spoke about his new project: TNB. I ordered the first album, and the sounds from the gardenshed of doom definitely changed things.**

ALAP: **So it was Richard Rupenus who got you onto the *Le Couperet* compilation?**

JV: **I started to exchange material with Richard, who has always taken good care of Vortex Campaign. I sent Richard some cassettes from live gigs we did in Flanders. I was very pleased when he sent me the *Le Couperet* tape, which included Vortex Campaign. He then invited us for the *Slaughter Of The Innocent* tape, and he then mentioned the *Distruct* release on Selektion (21), and VC participated. This mix project gave me the idea for a collaboration with TNB. Richard sent material which resulted in *The New Vortex Blockaders Campaign*. Later, TNB also contributed to the *Dolbied* tape with Coil (22). In fact, every VC release is thanks to Richard. There is not much VC material around. We're lazy Belgians, I guess, and dropped VC activities for 20 years.**

ALAP: **Can you talk about the equipment and recording methods used on those few releases?**

JV: **Vortex Campaign started as Torturkammer, named after the SPK track 'Stammheim Torturkammer.' Torturkammer was just a bunch of friends, with me on tapes and my brother Paul did visuals. We did one live gig for a heavy metal crowd. But the VC method of operation was already there; backing tapes with rhythm and effects and live improvisation using the instruments of other bands on the bill. We used tapes on a reel-to-reel. Big early influences on the VC working method were Non, The Residents, and early MB like the *NH-HN* cassette released by the Belgian label Grafika Airlines.**

ALAP: **Looking back at the VC catalogue, how do you feel about it now?**

JV: **I was very pleased when I saw that the VC/TNB material was bootlegged and properly re-released. It's nice to hear that great bands (and great people) like Wolf Eyes and Prurient like Vortex Campaign's work. I am delighted to see that in Belgium, the yearly KRAAK festival brings the cream of underground music to my doorstep. For their birthday party, KRAAK invited Nurse With Wound. People like Dennis Tyfus and his Ultra Eczema label are very active and make a lot happen over here. What I am saying is that it lives! I contacted Richard again, after 20 years, because he planned the reissue of *Dolbied* as *The Melancholy Mad Tenant* on CD. I was then invited to contribute to the *Viva Negativa* tribute. Richard was also involved with the Broken Flag retrospective. It is great to see how much care went into those boxed sets.**

BF29 / BFV4 - RAMLEH, 'The Hand of Glory'

The 7-inch version of 'The Hand Of Glory' was the only vinyl single released on Broken Flag. With the region of playing time being around the 19 minute mark, the quality suffered somewhat, but it adds to the recording's suffocating atmosphere. Mundy thinks this was the last Ramleh recording that could be considered Power Electronics. A cassette version was released too, without any extra material, and to celebrate the 25th year of the band during 2007, a 12-inch version was released jointly by Harbinger Sound and Hospital Productions. The original pressing was limited to 500 copies, whilst the 12-inch reissue ran to 200 only.

ALAP: **How did you become aware of the IPS studio? Had it expanded to an 8-track studio by the time you used it?**

GARY MUNDY: **Yeah, it was an 8-track then. William had used it for Whitehouse and Steve Stapleton had recorded Nurse With Wound there, so it had a good reputation. Dave Kenny and Peter McGhee were great engineers, both really supportive and happy to deal with whatever we threw at them. We recorded there until the Toll album, and then it closed down, so I recorded at home until JTI came along.**

ALAP: **Why did you feel it was worthwhile to record as Ramleh in a real studio, as opposed to the home recordings of some of your earlier solo works?**

GM: **I wanted to expand the sound and make the records bigger than and different from the cassette releases. I did put some home recorded stuff out on vinyl, like the tracks on *Neuengamme* and 'Bite The Bolster' from the *Never Say When* compilation, although they were tweaked a little in the studio.**

BF31 - VARIOUS, Trial By Ordeal
BF35 - VARIOUS, Collaboration
BF36 - VARIOUS, Ex - The Backlash

ALAP: **Can you tell me about your connection to Broken Flag?**

ROBERTO MARINELLI (LAXATIVE SOULS): **Oh, I'm a very very old man now with a spoiled soul; how can you guess that I'd remember? From 1980 to 1985 I was in touch with almost all the 'important' crazy noisemakers and artists from the scene you are referring to. The mail-box was like a dock on a sea of crossed relations. The contributions to those cassettes had to be the prologue to a release proposed by Gary Mundy, so that's why I sent the tracks. I had a lot of recordings available, all made with much work, random procedures, along with surrealistic style editings, personal and historical quotations. It had to be one of their first releases, but I was not so excited. I always thought my sounds weren't interesting, and only meant as a personal expression, something due to the frustration of an old rocker's generation with an open mind, so I never insisted.**

ALAP: **How did the FâLX çèrêbRi appearance on *Collaboration* come about?**

GRAF HAUFEN (FÂLX ÇÈRÊBRI): **As far as I can remember, I was in touch with Gary, as I was selling some of his stuff through my Mutant Muzick Distribution network in Germany. Plus, I bought quite a few of his tape releases, which amazed me constantly. I presume that I sent him my own recordings at some point and he accepted them for the *Collaboration* tape.**

ALAP: **The tracks are fairly early examples of your work, as you started in June 1983. How do you feel they stand up against the rest of your output?**

GF: **Well, it's hard for me to judge. FâLX çèrêbRi was never meant to be of a constant quality or a certain style. When you listen to the first album, *Rite 64*, there are various styles from tribal to cut-up collages to strange nihilistic experiments. FâLX çèrêbRi live was always a different experience as the live stuff was more 'in your face' and noisy. My equipment was pretty limited. My father had a few synthesizers and keyboards, effects and rhythm boxes, but I always asked for irregular musical solutions to my ideas. This was the time that MIDI had just begun, but still before sampling. Many of my collage works would have been more in the vein of my original ideas had I had the technical possibilities then, but I was always happy with the way that the tunes turned out. I didn't really care about the inconsistencies then, as I accepted shortcomings and errors as part of the creative process. Listening back today makes me cringe sometimes though. Several tracks I can still relate to, many I can't. After *Rite 64*, the music of FâLX çèrêbRi went into more ritualistic fields, or what today would be called drone. Some of those tracks appeared on various international compilations and further expanded the spectrum of music I was exploring at that point in my life. Some work I've done has never been published, especially the music I composed for performances and installations I did around 1985-86. You also have to keep in mind that I was only sixteen when I started FâLX çèrêbRi.**

BF34 / BFV5 - VARIOUS, Statement

The *Statement* record featured around ten minutes of material each by Ramleh, Matthew Bower's Pure project, and the Un-Kommuniti, as well as a collection of Consumer Electronics pieces. The record's sleeve and labels omit any reference to these tracks, as Philip Best wasn't meant to record outside of Whitehouse, and this recording led to his second dismissal from Whitehouse around the time they had finished their second tour of Germany.

ALAP: **Can you tell me about your pre-Pure bands such as Sulphur Of Lions, etc.?**

MATTHEW BOWER (PURE/TOTAL/SKULLFLOWER): **Stuart and I had hometown post-Punk groups that were influenced by PiL, Bauhaus, etc. and Sulphur of Lions was the last of these, a bit like A Certain Ratio, 23 Skidoo, industrial punk-funk noise. Alex Windsor played bass and he wrote the Pure staple 'Slaves' at this point, with the Sulphur version having a beat and the Pure one a dirge, but the same bassline.**

ALAP: **How did you get hooked up with Gary and Broken Flag?**

MB: **Via Philip Best. I saw them early on, and although as performance art they were weak, musically it was very strong.**

ALAP: **Pure was fairly short-lived. Any fond memories?**

MB: **All fond memories, I think. Alex Binnie and myself's performance wrestling was always fun and funny, also a gallery performance when Jill Westwood pissed on the concrete floor, then we played and took the extra time and effort to drag each other through the 'mire' as much as possible.**

ALAP: **How did Pure come about and how did you hook up with Matthew?**

ALEX BINNIE (PURE/SKULLFLOWER): **I'd known Matthew for years since I lived in Farnham where he came from. I was 17 and a punk, and he would have been a couple of years younger than me, probably still at school. He was the singer in my brother's band, The Rubber Flowers, and I was the 'manager.' After I left Art School and moved to London, we started Pure.**

ALAP: **Can you us a little about your time playing in Pure?**

AB: **It was me, Matthew and our friend Alex [Windsor]. It had various manifestations, and was as much about performance art as music, really. I can remember doing a whole concert blindfolded, stumbling about the stage, and we did one where I covered myself in paint and it got all over the club, much to the annoyance of the organisers.**

I had done a lot of performance art at college and I was into the Actionists and pushing physical boundaries. I did vocals, played bass, and played violin. We did quite a number of gigs in London at mainly small club-type venues. It was definitely more about playing live and 'shocking' people. Many of the clubs were kind of New Romantic type venues and we would wind up the audiences, anything to get a reaction. All good fun.

ALAP: **You dismissed Philip from his Whitehouse role as he contributed towards the *Statement* album. What's the truth behind that story?**

WILLIAM BENNETT: **I simply wished him to be exclusive to the band.**

BF38 - RAMLEH, Live As I Have Won

The final Ramleh show was held on Saturday July 21st, 1984, at the Air Gallery in central London, with support coming from Matthew Bower's Total project and Madame Sadie. Even though it was ad-

(15) Letraset: A popular brand of rub-on transfer stencils.

(16) The Alarm: Terrible 'alternative-rock' band from Wales who proved popular throughout the early '80s with their overblown, pompous anthem-rock a la U2, Big Country, or Simple Minds.

(17) Dennis Nilsen: British serial killer active between 1977 and 1983, often referred to as 'The Muswell Hill Murderer.' Known to have killed 15 men and boys, chopping up their remains and stashing parts throughout his house. His first murder was committed on a man who he had taken home from the bar, killing him the morning after because he feared the man would leave him and never come back (one biography of Nilsen is titled 'Killing For Company'). Nilsen was eventually caught when drain cleaning companies found human remains clogging the sewage system in the area, and the smell emanating from his house was strong enough to elicit complaints from neighbors. Nilsen has been given life imprisonment without parole. Whitehouse's 'Right To Kill' LP (Come Organisation, 1983) is dedicated to him.

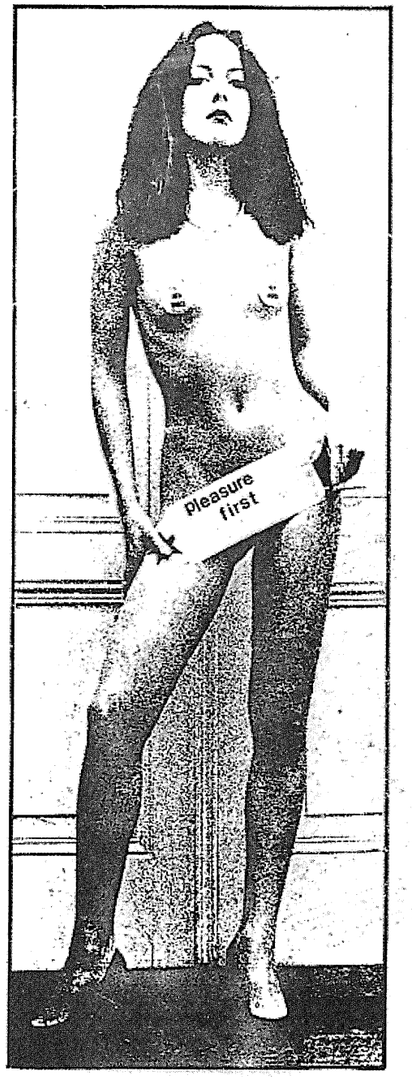
(18) Dr. Marcel André Henri Félix Petiot (1897-1946): Physician and serial killer who was suspected of the murder of nearly 60 people. Petiot managed to lure dozens of people with the prospect of safe passage from Nazi-occupied France to Argentina for the price of 25,000 francs. Before their 'departure,' Petiot demanded that victims receive 'inoculations' for their journeys (actually lethal injections of cyanide), pocketed the bounty, and discarded the bodies. Petiot was found (despite numerous disguises and aliases) on October 31, 1943, tried in 1946, and was executed by beheading in May of that year.

(19) New Musical Express: One of the four (at the time) weekly-published music newspapers in the U.K. Its influence was widely felt, more so than the competition.

(20) International Reply Coupons (IRC): Often used by tape traders/networkers when corresponding with like-minded people in other countries. When requesting information or a tape back from someone in your own country, you would enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope, but if you wanted to send an SASE to someone in another country, it could get sticky due to different postage rates for airmail and the difficulty of purchasing stamps from other countries at your local post office. IRCs circumnavigated this problem, as they could be redeemed for stamps in any country that accepted them.

(21) 'Distruct' (Selektion LP, 1984): release by P16.D4 that featured many mail/tape collaborators, including contributions from Vortex Campaign.

(22) 'Dolbied' cs: Technically released as 'Untitled,' the tape release became known as 'Dolbied' due to the noise-reduction designation printed on the tape label. The material has since been re-released as 'The Melancholy Mad Tenant,' along with additional VC material (including the 'Slaughter of the Innocent' tracks) on CD by Black Rose Recordings (2005) and on LP (minus bonus tracks and in slightly shortened form) by Important Records (2008).



RAMLEH TOTAL AND MADAME SADIE PLAY THE AIR BASEMENT 6-8 ROSEBERRY AVE LONDON EC4 8·00PM ADMISSION £2·00 SATURDAY JULY 21st RAMLEH ON STAGE 8·30PM FOR LAST EVER PERFORMANCE

vertised as Ramleh's last ever performance, Mundy had had enough by that point and started to pack away his gear before the band had even finished. This was to be the end of the Power Electronics era of the band.

ALAP: **Why did you never hold any Broken Flag 'Showcase' nights? You could've put together some great bills.**

GARY MUNDY: **Playing live always takes a lot out of me, as I find it very draining. The idea of having to organise other acts as well seemed too daunting. I thought about it, but I think that I would've only done it if Ramleh weren't playing. That last show at the Air Gallery was almost a showcase, I suppose, with Ramleh, Total, and Madame Sadie, but I knew I was quitting by then so I wasn't as worried.**

ALAP: **This was the gig where you started to pack up your equipment halfway through the set, right?**

GM: **I was very disenchanted at the time and wanted to do something else. The first half of the show was going okay, but at a certain point I just thought, "I really don't want to be doing this," and began to unplug my equipment and pack up. As soon as Jerome ended the last number I walked out to the pub across the street and didn't go back. I wanted to do something else. Jerome and Philip both left London shortly after, and I felt a huge sense of relief that it was over. Then I began the Toll project, which I had high hopes for and it excited me all over again.**

ALAP: **What's the truth behind the Madame Sadie story? I read an article which said that Sadie died in a car crash and the other two members just carried on.**

GM: **I really don't know. When I met them Madame Sadie was just two guys. We met a couple of times and they did that Air Gallery show, and I never saw them again.**

BF37 - RAMLEH, 104 Weeks
BF40 - RAMLEH, Awake!

ALAP: **You released two compilations of the older Ramleh about the same time as each other. Why? You had stopped running off the regular copies by then, hadn't you?**

GM: **Ramleh had split up and I wanted to delete everything, but I thought that I would put out one compilation of everything for anyone who was interested and a single cassette 'best of' for those on a budget.**

BF41 - VARIOUS, Morality
BF45 - VARIOUS, Riposte

ALAP: **Grey Wolves work features on both the *Morality* cassette and its counterpart release, *Riposte*. How soon were these tracks recorded after you started working as the Grey Wolves after the transformation from Opera For Infantry?**

TREVOR WARD (IRRITANT/GREY WOLVES/NAILS OV CHRIST): **A lot of the actual details are lost in the dim and distant past, but I'm sure, though not 100%, that our Grey Wolves submissions to Broken Flag were from the first phase of Grey Wolves activities which was pre '85. In late 1984, we ditched the name Opera For Infantry in favour of The Grey Wolves, and in this phase of The Grey Wolves we were a lot more experimental in our approach to sound. In 1985 we put The Grey Wolves on hold for two years and worked on solo material such as Tactical Aid Group and Nails Ov Christ. In 1987 we decided to cease that solo activity and concentrate on The Grey Wolves again. By this time, we'd ditched the experimental approach in favour of what we called, at the time, 'harsh industrial noise.' We'd also ditched some part-time members and in 1987 became The Grey Wolves that exist to this day.**

ALAP: **Le Syndicat material makes up the largest part of the *Riposte* compilation. Please give me your thoughts on that cassette.**

J.M. ONNI (LE SYNDICAT): **Yes, we have a lot of tracks on *Riposte*. The fact is that we sent some tracks to Gary and didn't think all would appear on the tape. Anyway, these tracks still are very representative of our original style and I have to say that I still appreciate them as they are some of the best ones we did for compilations, and that's why we chose some of them for our side on the Vinyl-On-Demand retrospective. There were some inventions on there due to the short duration that are quite different from our long-play cassette projects.**

BF30 - UN-KOMMUNITI, Mindretch

The Un-Kommuniti (aka Uncommunity) were based in Essex, England, and was the project of Tim Gane, who would later go on to find much wider fame as the mastermind behind Stereolab. But years prior to Stereolab, Gane had formed a band called McCarthy, as well as precursor bands dating back to 1983, with some school friends. At the same time, he ran The Uncommunity as an experimental sideline, as well as the Black Dwarf label. The material released by McCarthy, who went onto minor 'indie' fame, was very much a contrast to the starker sounds offered by Uncommunity, with its sweeping guitars and tumbling drums backing up a strong left-wing lyrical bias. Even though the Uncommunity was mostly a solo project for Gane, he enlisted the help of various friends for both recording sessions and live performances. The most regular of those faces were those of fellow Black Dwarf artists Kallous Boys, along with 'Jake Ray' (who was actually McCarthy bass player John Williamson) adding extra tapes and effects, plus Pete Levy and David 'Smut' Smith bringing in more percussion, guitar, or even a trumpet if required. Between themselves, they released, via Black Dwarf, over 20 cassettes, mostly working under pseudonyms such as Clench, Black Lung, Spinebender, Last Breath, and Assailer. Apart from a release by Justin Broadrick's Final and a handful of tracks on the few Black Dwarf compilations, everything else is, in fact, very much the work of various Uncommunity members. Over their life-span, they self-released the 'Brutality Of Fact' 7-inch and appeared on numerous vinyl compilations.

ALAP: **How did the contact with Tim Gane come about? Did he just drop you a line along with a cassette?**

GARY MUNDY: **I think so. I assume he heard about the label from somewhere. I loved his stuff from the first thing I heard as it was much more imaginative than a lot of the stuff I got sent.**

ALAP: **What's the story behind how Un-Kommuniti came about, and what was the initial motivation and influence?**

TIM GANE (UNCOMMUNITY): **The Uncommunity/Un-Kommuniti was basically myself and any friends I could rope in to play with me. The earliest releases were recorded live and so would normally require at least two people to make the music. Later releases were recorded on a Fostex 4-track tape recorder and was mostly just myself doing the music plus someone else if vocals were required. I started the group because I was very interested in making and recording 'Industrial,' electronic, improvised noise or whatever you want to call it. I was influenced in the beginning by Throbbing Gristle and Cabaret Voltaire and later by NWW, Come, Whitehouse, S.P.K., etc., the whole culture of it, really. I was a very big record and cassette collector then, and was really into the whole thing circa 1979-1984.**

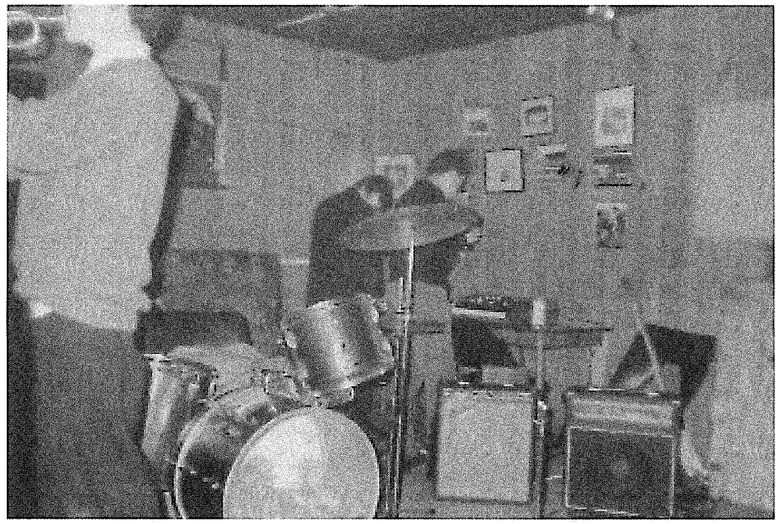
ALAP: **When did you make the connection with Broken Flag?**

TG: **I don't remember our first contact exactly, but I was a fan of the early Broken Flag records like *Neuengamme* and *A Return To Slavery/Slaughter At Random*, and had seen Ramleh play live. I always loved the early cassettes and their artwork in particular, so it was just a short step to send them my stuff and luckily, they liked it! I was very excited to have the Broken Flag design look on one of my cassettes. I carried on contributing tracks to various Broken Flag projects and compilations over the years, and I even contributed a long and incredibly boring article to Gary Mundy's Farben magazine.**

ALAP: **Tim was already working as Uncommunity prior to you joining. How did you become aware of him and his work?**

JOE MANNING (aka Moonboy), (UNCOMMUNITY/KALLOUS BOYS): **We were all part of the same loose social scene of misfits and musicians as Tim and his band, Natty Frogs, a precursor to McCarthy and Stereolab, and played local gigs that required support acts, so the Kallous Boys were born.**

VINCE ADAMS (aka Vince Van Hire) (UNCOMMUNITY/KALLOUS BOYS): **Joe and myself were involved in a few different musical projects before meeting up with Tim and a few other similar-minded people in and around the Barking area. We all kind of came across each other by chance, and we discovered we had all similar musical tastes, so we swapped music and attended gigs together. We became aware of The Natty Frogs and began attending their rehearsals and generally getting involved in different capacities. We were the ones who actually had our own 4-track, mixers, guitars, and synths. I think Tim started the Uncommunity and Black Dwarf initially as a side-project so he could produce more interesting, less mainstream music than the guitar, bass, drums, and vocals music that The Natty Frogs, and later McCarthy, were doing at that time.**



Uncommunity. 1983

ALAP: **The addition of the Kallous Boys enabled Uncommunity to become a live band, then? You never played outside of London, right? Can you tell us a little about these gigs?**

JOE MANNING: **The gigs were ramshackle and sporadic affairs. Occasionally, there were attempts at rehearsals with a view to setting up some sequencer lines, lyrical parts, or guitar parts in place prior to gigs, but at the point of performance, these were usually abandoned. Tape parts would generally start the proceedings for any performance and the rest would be us improvising our part with the dynamic of the piece changing depending on each of the contributors' moods or parts. I remember a gig at the Anarchist Bingo Hall** (23) **becoming particularly interesting when one member, Pete, had taken to micing up a pipe and dropping lit fireworks into it,**

(23) Anarchist Bingo Hall: One of the many squat venues on the early '80s London landscape. Today, this venue is better known as The Garage (in Islington, north London).

whilst another contributor of the time, Ashenden, interfered with Jake's tape manipulations, projected film across us, and for some reason started a fire offstage! I think the reason for playing solely in London was just due to the fact that there was a burgeoning live scene for that type of music in the city. I mean, Tim would occasionally put on gigs at the East Ham Football Club, but we could still go and see the likes of the Band Of Holy Joy in a pub in Forest Gate or Attrition in a small hall under Ilford town hall.

VINCE ADAMS: No, we never played outside of London, and even the London gigs could be a nightmare for us at that time, especially if John (Williamson) didn't have his wheels. Most, if not all, of the gigs were arranged around prepared tapes, which were generally not music but a collage of voice and sound loops that we had taken from various sources. We would then each improvise parts over the top of the tapes and see where it went.

ALAP: In effect, it was Tim's band, but you all played a role in creating the music. How did it work?

JOE MANNING: With the recordings it was pretty much a case that we would all convene in a room or studio where we would either attempt a performance as a band and come up with new parts that Tim could capture and use at a later date (tape it, distort it, release it), or we would add additional parts to something he was already working on. I know a couple of the earlier members, Dave Brown and Smut, found this difficult, as they wanted more control over what went on, whereas myself and Vincent were more than happy to turn up and make a noise to see what developed.

ALAP: Tim became a regular contributor towards various BF projects. Why was this? Did you feel he was something of a contemporary because of his ability to operate within different musical genres?

GARY MUNDY: Tim had a similar attitude to me about getting his own label together and forming projects that were more musical. He's the most successful artist from the Broken Flag camp, although it's a long leap from Un-Kommuniti to Stereolab. Like me, I think he believed it was all music regardless. He wasn't a noise-snob like some of the people I've dealt with.

ALAP: How do you view the *Mindretch* cassette now, and in relation to the other Un-Kommuniti recordings?

TIM GANE: It was a compilation of tracks that Gary chose from one or two of the Black Dwarf cassettes. He selected them to go more with the other Broken Flag releases, I think, and they all come from the early live recording days. I recently heard it again after a 20-plus year gap in order to give my permission for it to be included on the Broken Flag box set; it took a while, as I didn't have a copy anymore, but they sent me one and I enjoyed listening to it. I remembered everything about it 100%, down to the tiniest details. I could see myself playing it and what was going through my mind. I like it because it sounds very focused still, but I wish I had learned to edit myself more as there is quite a bit of waffle, and as there still is.

ALAP: What was the reason for the slight name change to Un-Kommuniti?

TG: Well, Uncommunity was the original spelling, but I wanted to use the in-vogue use of k's everywhere, like Lustmord (24), S.P.K., and so on. Later on, I thought it looked stupid and changed it back to the original spelling, same for Blakk Dwarf/Black Dwarf. I was only 15 or 16 when I started!

ALAP: I guess the spelling of Kallous Boys was, like the Un-Kommunity, a sign of the times, too?

JOE MANNING: Like a lot of what happened at the time, the name was merely an accident. Myself and Vincent had just performed a set, and I don't think we had a project name at that point when an audience member called us a pair of particularly callous boys. The name stuck, and in keeping with that genre, we adopted the obligatory K.

VINCE ADAMS: We enjoyed winding Tim up, and as I recall, the adoption of the 'K' was one of those occasions. Our cassettes also had a few in-jokes on them, and later we went a stage further on one compilation by using the pseudonym Kallous Kinema.

ALAP: Why did you work under so many aliases? Was it attempt to make Black Dwarf and the scene around it seem much bigger than it really was?

VA: From my point of view, it was partly an attempt to make that seem the case, but at the same time, we had then, and still have today, various aliases to reflect different facets of our work. For instance, we would assign music created using found sounds and tape manipulating to one alias, whilst drone synthesiser music would be assigned to another.

ALAP: How many Black Dwarf releases were there on cassette? My knowledge finishes at BDC20.

JOE MANNING: I'm not too sure, but knowing Tim's love of the aesthetic around Industrial and Noise music around that time, it won't have exceeded catalogue number BDC23!

ALAP: You were still producing Uncommunity recordings whilst working with your band McCarthy, right up to 1985. At what point did you feel that the time was right to finish with the Uncommunity project?

TIM GANE: Yes, there was a two or three year crossover period where I was doing both groups. In fact, the name 'McCarthy' came from the *Live McCarthy* cassette on Broken Flag. Eventually, I wanted to move away from the solitary music of Uncommunity to the more social group inter-activity of McCarthy. Uncommunity was my group entirely, whereas in McCarthy I was one of four, and it is great to play with other people and subsume yourself into the whole. Uncommunity eventually dribbled to a close, probably because I begun to have less time to do it and my interest went elsewhere.

ALAP: Were you aware of his band McCarthy at any point during your dealings with Tim?

GARY MUNDY: Yes, of course, McCarthy was named after a Ramleh track after all. He knew I was doing Breathless alongside Broken Flag and I think he thought that I would understand McCarthy, which I did. I think that Stereolab are better musically, but lyrically, there's some great stuff on those McCarthy records.

ALAP: Can you recall your dealings with Broken Flag at all? Any thoughts about whether Broken Flag had any influence on your work or your contributions to that label?

VINCE ADAMS: Personally, I exchanged a few letters with Gary and met him briefly when we were recording once at IPS studios, but other than that Tim dealt with him. As a label and as individuals we were greatly influenced by the likes of Industrial Records, United Dairies, and Come Organisation, as well as Broken Flag and a fair few others.

ALAP: Over the years I've heard various stories about the fate of the old Uncommunity master tapes. One was that you just threw them all away and the second that you gave them all to Thurston Moore at some point. Any truth to either of these? I'm guessing there are no plans for more Uncommunity reissues?

TIM GANE: Truth is I don't know what happened to them, exactly. They are certainly lost, but I never threw them away. I think I left them at my parents' house when I moved away and they probably ended up in the shed and went mouldy. I never found them there, but I did find the Uncommunity 7-inches in a mouldy but still playable condition. It's possible I could have taken them with me when I left, but I don't really remember, and at any rate they would still have gone damp in a box. It is true that many years later, I gave a lot of my 'Industrial' cassettes to Thurston for his tape museum or whatever it was, but those were mostly other people's music, not mine. Even if I gave him one or two, they would have been copies with sleeves, not the original master tapes, which never had sleeves. Somebody a few years back gave me a collection of the Uncommunity releases still 'available' or 'reissued' by the Freedom In A Vacuum bunch in Canada, not all of them but some, so it is possible to get them if you want, I suppose? I wouldn't mind the stuff being reissued; as always with these things, it's a matter of finding the time to get it done and do a good job, but I'm certainly not embarrassed by any of it, apart from some of the titles which are pretty bad.

BF46 - UNCOMMUNITY / CONTROLLED BLEEDING, Across the Stagnant Pond

ALAP: You teamed up Uncommunity with Controlled Bleeding for a split cassette. Why did you think this coupling would work?

GARY MUNDY: Like Tim, Paul Lemos is a musician who will work in different areas without fear. I thought they had a similar attitude, but with Tim's English twist and Paul's American angle to differentiate them. It just seemed like a good complimentary package to me.

PAUL LEMOS (CONTROLLED BLEEDING): I had nothing to do with this release. Gary was friends with Tim and he put this together. I had no contact or knowledge of the Uncommunity. I wish I had, since I really love a lot of the Stereolab material.

BF39 - CONTROLLED BLEEDING, Distress Signals
BF42 - CONTROLLED BLEEDING, Sense May Come

Anyone who may have heard the earliest incarnation of Controlled Bleeding in the late 1970s could hardly have been prepared for what followed. Originally billed as Body Sink and conceived as a high-octane instrumental progressive rock unit, the band dissolved and reformed as Controlled Bleeding in the early 1980s. Their earliest tapes, as well as their vehement debut LP, *Knees and Bones*, seemed to run contra to the very concept of music. It's an oft-told story, but at a time when templates for aggressive anti-sound were few and far between, the trio of Paul Lemos, Chris Moriarty, and Joe Papa created a new and startling cacophony mostly out of scrap metal, aggressive drumming, and bloodcurdling vocal histrionics, and *Knees and Bones* stands as the type of flag-in-the-sand statement of individuality that distinguished Controlled Bleeding alongside other lone-wolf groups like the Nihilist Spasm Band, Borbetomagus, and The New Blockaders. They were even slated to release an LP for Broken Flag (BFV09, later claimed by Skullflower), but the project was called off as the label began to wind down activity.

For many, Controlled Bleeding's greatest strength (and possibly its Achilles heel) was the band's creative restlessness. In a career spanning several decades, CB managed to reinvent themselves many times over, creating albums in styles ranging from rhythmic industrial to dark ambient to gothic melancholy. A track on the Alchemy Records compilation *World Record* helped alert a new generation of noise fanatics to the early Controlled Bleeding sound, and numerous reissues and archival collections have made many of the most abrasive CB recordings available again. Sadly, Controlled Bleeding founding members Chris Moriarty and Joe Papa passed away in 2008 and 2009, respectively.

ALAP: How did you get connected with Broken Flag to start with?

PAUL LEMOS: Gary and I became friendly through correspondence. I was writing about music and doing some work on college radio and contacted Gary after hearing the first Broken Flag compilation album, I forget the title. Shortly thereafter, I sent him some of the stuff I was working on with a totally revamped concept of Controlled Bleeding and was soon invited to submit some stuff to one of the Broken Flag cassette releases.

ALAP: You dealt with Paul Lemos many times over the years, and he was a regular cheerleader for Broken Flag in the underground press of the time. How was contact made in the first place?

GARY MUNDY: Again memory fails me, but I think he sent me a tape. He was very supportive, as you say, and fortunately his music was great. It's always worrying when you like someone but don't like their music, but luckily Paul's music was really great. Paul is also a fantastic guitar player, although he would probably deny that. I think I like his guitar playing more than he does. Like me, he came at the whole Power Electronics/Noise scene from a more musical angle. He understands structure and has an instinctive feel for this stuff. When you listen to as many Noise cassettes as I did at that time, the good stuff really stands out from the dross.

ALAP: The first cassette, *Distress Signals*, was noticeably different to the one that followed. These style changes and progressions have been a constant during Controlled Bleeding's recording career. Any thoughts about these cassettes now?

PAUL LEMOS: I don't recall the content of those early cassettes, but in listening back to a lot of early material for some archive projects that are now underway, I can see that we quickly moved away from the straight-up screaming noise to a more textural experimental mess. I was always primarily a guitar player and had a great love of early Prog, and the grime of early Stooges, MC5, etc., so I guess after the initial liberating primal scream was vented, we started reverting back to more conventional ideas, and that has been the course of the band's career for the most part; a schizophrenic, unpredictable output that lacks consistency.

ALAP: The two cassettes you released by Controlled Bleeding are very different stylistically. How do you view those releases now?

GARY MUNDY: I still love all the Controlled Bleeding material I released. The variety was a great thing to me. That recent Vinyl-On-Demand box set shows you the reach of the band with both really ambitious music and very successful experiments.

ALAP: You included some of Mundy's work as Toll on the first of your *Dry Lungs* compilation series. What was the motivation for that set of albums?

PAUL LEMOS: *Dry Lungs* started as an outgrowth of my enthusiasm for this new musical community that I had become aware of. I was hungry back then, and wanted to expose this stuff that so excited me and in the process further the exposure of my own music. I was always interested in bringing this music to the wider 'rock' audience, and who would have expected Placebo Records, then a well-distributed Punk label, to take the bait and actually release them? Looking back, it was kind of an egotistical move including Controlled Bleeding and various sub-projects on every volume, but as I said, I was hungry.

ALAP: Lemos, like Gane, is another player with the ability to try out other styles of music with success, and has also had a long-term 'career.' It seems to me that a vast selection of people that had work released via Broken Flag went onto a long-term investment in creating music, and there seems to be very few fly-by-nights. Any thoughts on that?

GARY MUNDY: It's interesting isn't it? I doubt it has much to do with Broken Flag except that, I think, maybe it's more likely that people were attracted by a kindred spirit. I suppose it was obvious that I meant what I was doing and was putting my money and reputation on the line a lot. I think I'm also a good judge of character and I was attracted more to people with genuine ambition than those who were having a laugh. You can nearly always tell. I generally avoided the poseurs. There were a lot of people who 'looked the part' but really had no musical ideas worth bothering with.

BF43 / BFV6 - GIANCARLO TONIUTTI, La Mutazione

Although trained in electronic music at the Conservatory of Venice in the early '80s, Giancarlo Toniutti's earliest influences were grounded in the underground rock and Kosmische music of the '70s. While many of his recorded works and site installations stem from empirical research into acoustic sound properties, his love of less academic underground and experimental sound practitioners prompted him to get in touch with Gary Mundy, and the result was his debut LP, *La Mutazione*. Subsequent releases have been sporadic, but always meticulously constructed. In 2009, Vinyl-On Demand released a triple-LP + 10-inch box set compiling the earliest Toniutti works.

ALAP: How did you get connected to Broken Flag?

GIANCARLO TONIUTTI: It was late 1983, and I think I had just bought, probably from Aeon distribution, *The Plain Truth* record by Maurizio Bianchi and got the BF address. It was a period of new contacts for me, looking for any way to enlarge my network. So I wrote to Gary about his catalogue, etc. and presented myself and my work. I then received from him the offer to contribute to *Trial By Ordeal* and then the 'affair' *La Mutazione*, which I formally thought was going to be published by Aeon, but then reworked and offered to Gary. During this period, I had been offered different collaborations to Broken Flag magazines, but I have always remained an outsider actually.

GARY MUNDY: Yeah, he just wrote to me. I think he liked Maurizio Bianchi's work, and he was also a friend of Mauro Teho Teardo, who I think I knew by then, too. It's probably the Broken Flag album that takes the most time to 'get' and I think it improves with time.

ALAP: How do you feel about the *La Mutazione* album and the compilation tracks now...any thoughts?

GIANCARLO TONIUTTI: Of course, looking back to these things, I certainly feel them to be rather naïve, in a diminishing manner, of course. But I think it was somehow inevitable. Right now, looking through the first cassettes for this 3LP set that Vinyl-On-Demand have offered to publish, I have discovered many continuities with my current view of music structure and morphology, and also, of course, many discontinuities. In any case, I feel they have been a rather personal way to approach music, and still seem to have their own value. I cannot properly judge, from the author's position, their place in the history of music, but in a sense I feel they have been somehow seminal. Maybe I can say this from the words of people who have referred to them in this way. The interesting point I still see therein, still from the author's point of view, is that they all have been built around simple yet very unconditioned musical thoughts. They represent a pure way of approach to music.

BF44 - LE SYNDICAT, Rectal Struggle

As with the Dada movement in the mid-1910s, France may not have been an epicenter of Power Electronics activity in the early '80s, but its exports to the movement as a whole were potent. Just as Dada as a whole received a substantial boost from nihilistic Parisians like Francis Picabia, so did PE expand its sonic palette thanks to the punishing contempt of Le Syndicat, a band originally conceived with no limit to the amount of members in its ranks, but still headed up by Jean-Marie ("J.M.") Onni. The group never stood still long enough for pigeonholing, rapidly shifting away from its early noise-with-rhythm style in favor of more dancefloor-friendly later albums. Many of the band's early tapes, featuring the sound that might be most interesting to PE/Noise fans, have been kept in print as reissues on the RRR/PURE label, while a double CD on Staalplaat that reprises three more early tapes (reissued first as a 3 x LP box set on RRR) remains easy to find. Onni was also responsible for the hyper-cut-up noise unit Entre Vifs.

ALAP: How did you get hooked up with Broken Flag?

J.M. ONNI: By 1985, I had known about Broken Flag for a time. I was sort of a young Ramleh fan and I

(24) A reference to the early Lustmord cassette release 'Lustmordekay' (Sterile Records, 1982).

really preferred them to Whitehouse and Sutcliffe Jugend. I found the Ramleh material much more complex and symphonic than the other Power Electronics productions of this period. I was introduced to Broken Flag productions by Pacific 231, who had been involved in Industrial music longer than me, so when Gary Mundy asked for contributions to Broken Flag projects, I was happy to send material to this great label.

GARY MUNDY: Just the usual dull story. They sent me the tape and it was great, so I agreed to release it. The fact they were relatively known by then wasn't really an issue for me.

ALAP: Le Syndicat started in 1982, and the cassette you did for Broken Flag was recorded in 1985. What are your thoughts on these early works now?

J.M. ONNI: Le Syndicat produced tapes from 1982 onwards, but that middle-eighties period was a sort of 'age d'or' for our original sound. The fact was that we had already experimented a lot with our low-fi material and by 1985 we were ready to begin a new noise era. *Rectal Struggle* was some kind of zenith of that first Le Syndicat period, with rough cut-ups, destructive sounds, radio and TV samples. Our style changed after 1985 to our 'lyrical noise-craft,' with more mixing, more electronics, more use of the voice, and use of other music, especially classical music. In 1985, we were also more active with mail-art than we were in 1982 or by the end of the eighties. That was the time when we contributed to a lot of compilations, co-released some tracks with Merzbow and some other bands from Japan released tapes on other labels, and our label released work from foreign bands.

ALAP: Was the typo on the title deliberate or was it a shortage of Letraset? (25)

GARY MUNDY: That was how they sent it to me. I decided not to question it and put it out as it was. I thought some people might wonder if it meant something different. I suppose it amused me at the time.

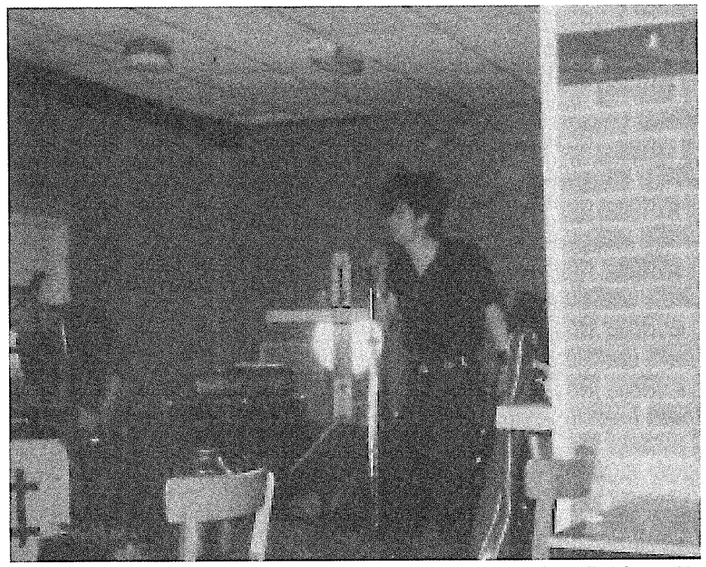
ALAP: There's been plenty of reissues of the Le Syndicat back catalogue, including a long-standing working relationship with RRRecords. Are there any more reissue plans?

J.M. ONNI: The major part of our early productions has already been reissued by RRR and also Staalplaat, but these releases are more concerned with our 'lyrical noisecraft' second phase of Le Syndicat, so there's not much more to be reissued from this period. From the first period, RRR released *Relikat & Shraguemusik* (26). We have a few compilation tracks, such as those that appeared on *Riposte*, as well as *Hammerbones - Putrefied Brain*, released by Ladd-Frith, which is quite similar material to *Rectal Struggle*. I think it's more difficult to release CDs now than in the nineties, and I don't think there'll be any more reissues.

BF47 - IRRITANT, Mesmerised

ALAP: When did you discover Broken Flag?

TREVOR WARD: I can't remember exactly how it came to be, but back then, we were forever recording and sending our recordings out to whatever labels we found appealing and that seemed interesting, or of an extreme nature. We'd ask the labels if they'd give our material the time of day or even better release something by us. Broken Flag obviously received something of ours and deemed us



Opera For Infantry. 1984

worthy of inviting to submit some tracks for one of their compilations as The Grey Wolves.

ALAP: Over the years, as whichever one of your projects, you have made little concession on the artwork you choose to accompany your music. You obviously feel this to be an important issue?

TW: It seemed to make sense to use extreme images and statements, etc. to go along with the extreme experimental noise we were creating. As time went by, we saw no reason to change this; they went hand in hand. When there seemed to be a bit of a backlash against the sort of imagery we were using, the easy option would have been to turn to non-offensive material like so many did at the time, but we've tried to stay true to our origins. The Grey Wolves were, and are, an extreme electronic unit dealing in extreme subject matter. We could have chosen arty or abstract imagery to make ourselves more acceptable, but deliberately choose not to. An 'extreme' unit playing safe, that wasn't for us. I still prefer brutal imagery, or artwar, over the abstract stuff that adorns so many releases nowadays.

ALAP: To this day, you continue to carry on releasing material by other bands on your labels, from Zeal Tapes and Anal Probe up to Open Wound and Industrial Heritage. How important a function is this to you?

TW: It's important, if that's the right word, in that the label allows us an outlet for our own creations and that of our allies. Running Industrial Heritage is a labour of love and if it were all to end tomorrow, the label and The Grey Wolves, I wouldn't miss it financially because I've never run the label efficient enough to live on, but I'd definitely miss the networking side of things. Opening up the lines of communication with new, interesting allies is something I'd put ahead of shifting loads of CDs any day. I still get excited when I hear a new unit whose sound I just can't get enough of. If I can use the label or website to help spread their name about, I'm happy to do so. It's the creative side of things I enjoy the most, the recording and designing, the burning and the packaging, holding the finished item in my hands and feeling proud that I've been involved in something that will be a listening pleasure, or aural torture, depending on who's listening.

ALAP: At the time, you were running cassette labels such as Mindscan. What was your motivation and was Broken Flag a direct influence on this?

ROBERT MAYCOCK (SATORI): Prior to Mindscan Tapes was Jumping For Joy and before that was Dachau Productions. I changed the name to Jumping For Joy from Dachau Prods because somebody who I can't remember now asked if I supported fascism. I had chosen the name because I thought it was a powerful name for a tape label and I had not considered the fact that I might be perceived as pro-fascist because of it. Accordingly, I changed the name straight away as I'm not a fascist. Shortly after that, I changed it again to Mindscan because I preferred it. The motivation for Mindscan and the previous tape labels was to make compilation cassettes and help promote the underground music that I enjoyed. It was a good way to hear new material which would otherwise have passed me by. Broken Flag was not a direct influence on any of my tape labels.

ALAP: Did you spend much time following the works of other cassette labels? Were there any particular ones that stood out that maybe you felt some kinship with?

GARY MUNDY: Not really. I was influenced by the Come Org releases, as I mentioned earlier, and obviously Philip Best's Iphar ran alongside Broken Flag for a while, so we were in close contact. Other people ran labels, but although I liked a lot of what was being put out, it didn't make much difference to what I did.

BF48- FERIAL CONFINE, Meiosis

Although Andrew Chalk considers the *Meiosis* tape one of his poorer releases, a large chunk of noise listeners would beg to differ. This recording has a harsh atonality that stands proudly alongside works

by The New Blockaders and the rawer Organum releases. In fact, Chalk would go on to provide source materials for many future TNB releases and even became a fleeting member of Organum, playing on their *Submission* album. Although Chalk has produced a phenomenal body of work, mostly of a sonorous range of drones, and worked with collaborators and friends as diverse as Christoph Heeman and Colin Potter, his most intriguing recordings, released in retrospect under the Ferial Confine name, can be found on the Siren and Fusetron labels.

ALAP: What were your dealings with Broken Flag like?

ANDREW CHALK (FERIAL CONFINE): My problem with Broken Flag was that I asked for *Meiosis* to be deleted very soon after it was put on the catalogue, because I just did not like it then and I can hardly believe that my wishes were considered at all because it seems like so many people do have it. Added to that I never did receive the reel-masters back for the tracks that I submitted for the *Never Say When* compilation despite requests to Gary Mundy. Obviously back in those days it was pretty hard to make a copy of something other than onto a cassette, and things like this were important signs.

ALAP: The *Meiosis* cassette is regarded by many as one of the highpoints in your catalogue, but I understand that Andrew Chalk wasn't pleased with it and wanted it withdrawn pretty much fairly quickly. What was the situation?

GARY MUNDY: It's a classic tape to my mind, but I think that Andrew was moving on to other things quite rapidly and he was a bit embarrassed by it, as he thought he was doing much better music. I don't necessarily disagree but that doesn't stop the tape being great of its kind. Like you say, a lot of people liked it.

BF49 / BFV7 - TOLL, Christ Knows
BF50 - TOLL, No Doubt

As Broken Flag started to wind down its activities during late summer 1984, the bulk of the old cassette releases were deleted and focus was placed on the future. November saw the beginnings of a new group called Toll, with Mundy again at the helm. The idea was to present spontaneity as the vital input into the recordings made by the trio. Postal-exchanged source material contributions from Broken Flag regulars such as The Un-Kommuniti and Controlled Bleeding, amongst others, mixed into the group's studio work. The results were released during 1986 as the *Christ Knows* album, and a cassette was issued which featured an assortment of outtakes and rehearsal cuts, some of which contained a few more obvious post-Punk moves. The album was reissued by Cold Spring in 2006 with additional tracks pulled from the *No Doubt* cassette and featured a new sleeve design.

ALAP: How did the Toll project come about?

GARY MUNDY: After we disbanded Ramleh, I wanted to form a very different experimental band with less electronics, more guitar-based but still very different from anything else out there. My original plan was that I would work with different people on each track, but then I decided that I needed a sounding board, and would need one other constant member.

ALAP: Where did you know Tim and Matthew from?

GM: The person I asked to be that other member was Tim Soar. Tim was a friend of mine who worked in a record shop in Croydon and was also going out, at the time, with the sister of Debbie Thomas. So I asked Tim to join me. He was reluctant at first as, by his own admission, he wasn't a musician. I've always liked working with non-musicians as they often come up with ideas that musicians would never consider. Tim eventually said that he would do it but only if we added another 'musician' to the band. He suggested Matthew Frith, who was another Croydon-based musician, who I knew a little but not too well. I thought it would be interesting, so the three of us became Toll.

ALAP: I heard you recorded the *Christ Knows* album within three days with no rehearsals or advance planning. Can you tell us a little about that?

GM: The album took a little longer than three days, but there were certainly no rehearsals and very few planned ideas. I wanted to use the instruments in the room and the room itself to create whatever worked best on the day, or to base ideas around pre-recorded tapes that had been sent to me by other artists. It came thick and fast and very quickly, we had an album's worth of material. Sometimes we got friends in to help out, or it was just the three of us, but the results were very exciting. The mixing process took a little longer due to the lack of funds and it all took about a year eventually, when we had decided not to pursue the project any further after the album came out. We never played live, either.

ALAP: Why have the mail contributions from Gane, Lemos, etc. been included in the work?

GM: That was one of the original ideas I mentioned. People would either come by the studio or send me a tape for us to work with. We used contributions to form tracks around. The contributors had no idea what we would do with their work and I'm not sure what any of them made of the results.

ALAP: Was the *No Doubt* cassette just out-takes from these sessions?

GM: The *No Doubt* cassette was a mixture of discarded tracks from the album and remixes of some of those tracks. The project lasted just over a year from start to finish, after which I finally felt ready to work alone as Ramleh, which I did until Matthew Bower joined me in 1987.

ALAP: You gave out previously released Toll tracks for compilation appearances as opposed to unreleased material. Was this due to a lack of material?

GM: There wasn't much unreleased material that we wanted to put out. Some of the compilation tracks are remixes or different takes, but between *Christ Knows* and the *No Doubt* cassette, that was about all there was. Tim went back to working in record shops and I lost touch with Matthew Frith; I'm not sure what happened to him. I'm pleased with the way most of the material turned out, but I think that it was a one-album project ultimately.

ALAP: Why did you change the artwork for the CD reissue of the album?

GM: I was never happy with the original cover. It didn't look the way I wanted it to. It was a haunting picture of the covered dead bodies of children from a coach crash in France, but the picture didn't look right on the cover. It didn't look like what it was and consequently didn't have the impact of the original picture. For the reissue I chose the cover image from a large selection sent to me by Justin Mitchell. I think he wanted something in keeping with his label's usual artwork and I liked the picture we chose. It looks like the music sounds, if that makes sense. It gives the impression of something empty and slightly industrial. I think the music reflects that empty, hollow, impersonal thing that the picture depicts. People are funny about reissues, though, and some complained about the changed sleeve. Oh well, I've never set out to please everyone, so why start now?

BF53 - TOTAL, Hard and Low

ALAP: Total was your solo project after Pure. How did this come about?

MATTHEW BOWER: It was actually initially a two person group with Hugh Harwood from Ake. We 'borrowed' the name from some of Stefan's friend's defunct Cardiff group, and the first cassette, *Land Murder*, was put out as a duo.

ALAP: The *Hard + Low* cassette appeared a couple of years into Total's existence. How do you feel about that recording now?

MB: Um, it's good, there's a lot of 'early sampling' going on via a Boss pedal. The last piece is made out of a big chord that occurs halfway through Mahler's unfinished tenth symphony. I still love Mahler, and about this time Philip Best told me that Ramleh was actually an 'on purpose' anagram of Mahler...concentration camp or Jewish composer?

BF56 - M.T.T., Devayana
BF68 - MAURO TEHO TEARDO, Northern Age

Mauro Teho Teardo's two Broken Flag cassettes are fine examples of the early primitive post-Industrial works of M.T.T., alongside a handful of self-released titles such as *Coliga Matari*.

Teho Teardo would resurface a couple of years after these releases with a new focus to his work which was sadly overlooked due to his seemingly misguided use of irony: during this period, he took to dressing up as a clichéd heavy metal singer, using photographs of this look across the sleeves of his collaboration works with Ramleh and others, much to the disgust of experimental music snobs and subsequently shooting his avant-garde music career in the foot. He later turned this to his advantage with the rock trio Meathead, who went on to minor popularity around Europe; he also remixed material for the likes of Lydia Lunch and Cop Shoot Cop.

Nowadays his efforts are fully focused upon soundtrack and installation works; another example of the kind of multi-taskers that Broken Flag attracted.

(25) The title is actually (mis-)spelled 'Rectal Strugle' on the original cassette cover.

(26) RRR/PURE also reissued 'Corrumpate' and 'Rectitude,' as well as the Le Syndicat/Phaeton Dernière Danse collaboration, 'Théophanie À Visu.'

ALAP: **When and how did you become aware of the Broken Flag label?**

MAURO TEHO TEARDO (M.T.T.): **Back when I was 16, a school mate gave me a Whitehouse and a Ramleh record, it could have been in 1983. Back then I was listening to Black Sabbath and new wave, but I liked them immediately because of the extreme sound. Loud, harsh, and without compromise. Perfect for a teenager. Later on, Ramleh had a deeper impact on me because they had more consciousness; the music was definitely more interesting than Whitehouse. Then I found out about Broken Flag and followed most of the releases on the label, and loved most tapes that Gary put out, as well as albums like Toll.**

ALAP: **Then you were motivated to produce your own recordings?**

MTT: **I brought a 4-track recorder and started working under the influence of the records that I could put my hands on, like Nurse With Wound, Ramleh, and so on. Then I went to London several times and met Gary, a very nice person. He was always so kind to send me records that I couldn't find in Italy. He then put out a couple of tapes I did as Devayana and Northern Age. Gary was also involved in Breathless and he's an amazing guitar player. I remember the rigidity of the people into Broken Flag that couldn't stand Breathless, narrow-minded people. Unfortunately, the more 'experimental' area was very narrow-minded and that was one of the reasons it became less and less interesting in a very short time, just a few years.**

ALAP: **What were your first dealings with M.T.T.?**

GARY MUNDY: **I don't remember the first time. He probably wrote to me or sent a tape.**

ALAP: **How do you view those cassettes now?**

MAURO TEHO TEARDO: **I don't remember them too well, it's been such a long time, but I feel comfortable with them even if they are quite naïve, but I like to think they're well linked to several other interesting experiences of that music field of the time. Of course, they suffer from the problems of that particular kind of music, mainly self-indulgence.**

ALAP: **You self-released a few cassettes prior to those on Broken Flag. Can you tell us a little about these and the development of your ideas?**

MTT: **The first one was titled *The Birth of The Day*. The music was so naïve, nothing special really, but my aim was to make something new, something that sounded just like myself. I didn't succeed, but it was the beginning of a new vision. Other tapes came out on other labels, like *Coliga Materi* for a label in Norway. The music on this one was very hypnotic as I was experimenting with tapeloops, percussion, and adding drones played with a clarinet. Despite the fact that the sound was poor, there's a harmonic plan behind it, which is something that still backs up most of my compositions today. I wanted to make an album, but I had no idea how to make it, the knowledge about the architecture of sound was what I was lacking, so I asked for help from those who knew how to do it, Nurse With Wound and Ramleh. I wrote to Steve Stapleton and Gary Mundy and I'll always be thankful for their availability.**

ALAP: **It seems you fell silent for a few years after the *Northern Age* cassette, then emerged with a new M.T.T. sound. Why the silence?**

MTT: **I've never been silent, probably I should have been, but wasn't. I remember going through a phase in which I had no idea of what I was doing to a point in which I learned to plan things out and define a project.**

ALAP: **What can you tell us about the releases you did for Minus Habens, and the involvement of Ramleh as a contributor to this project?**

MTT: **I made two albums and one 7-inch on Minus Habens. The first one, *Caught From Behind* featuring Nurse With Wound and Ramleh, was a record in which the collaboration aspect was very important. I had been recording on my own for years and was very open to collaborate with other artists because that was a significant way to put my music into discussion. Working with other musicians obliges you to compromises that could open new perspectives to your sound. I was interested in learning from them and so I did. Stapleton's input is basically a rework of tapes that I gave him that he manipulated, and that ended up exactly that way on the album master. I also reworked the tapes he sent me and most of that first side of the album has been shaped that way. The other side sees a lot of cassette sounds I received from Gary Mundy and that became the sources for the compositions that define the second side of that album.**

Then I was interested in the clear definition of roles and that's why I decided the right format for my next record should be a split album, and that's what happened with the *Paid In Full/Crystal Revenge* LP and the M.T.T./Skullflower 7-inch release. But the 7-inch was a clear sign that my exploration in the more freeform territory of the first two records was over and I was getting interested in repetition, tapeloops, and the possibilities offered by samplers. I know that sound could have been easily rejected by the 'experimental' audiences, but that experience was over for me. I was looking for something else and that's why a few days after its release I started Meathead, the band in which I could experiment more with the repetitivity of noise and the song form.

I remember that scene as a very narrow-minded one, and that's why I thought it was interesting to adopt weird graphic layouts for the album covers. Both my records could fit better within the 'metal' booth rather than the 'leftfield' area that easily hosted most of the names of the time. I thought that scene lacked a sense of humour as most of the album covers were autopsy, Nazi iconography, and so on. I liked the idea to have an album cover more inspired by Zodiac Mindwarp, a really cheesy Metal band of the late eighties, rather than the usual boring stuff I saw around everywhere in those days. I don't regret those embarrassing covers that didn't represent me at all, but my records ended up in the 'metal' sections of the indie shops. That didn't help much. But I could've been doing the same thing over and over; that usually pays well and you can see how many names from that age ended up repeating their formula — people buy it, there's a fetishistic side of the audience that makes them buy these things. I was interested in doing something else, so I did, and I am still making music twenty years later and making ends meet for my family making the music I like.

ALAP: **You went on to have a long-running working relationship with M.T.T. Can you tell us about that?**

GARY MUNDY: **Mauro was one of the few that I met in person. He would come over to London sometimes and come over and visit. We got along pretty well. I released some more stuff. He used some Ramleh music along with some Nurse With Wound on his album and then got Ramleh to do the split album with him which came out pretty well. He also promoted some Breathless shows in Italy, which didn't go too well, and we kind of lost touch after that. I think he lost some money. It was all a bit embarrassing. I have no hard feelings, though, and I don't think he does. He was a lovely bloke. I miss seeing him. Another Italian, of course. The Italian thing wasn't particularly conscious but I liked them and they seemed to like what I did, so there's some kind of link somewhere. I'm on the same wavelength as a lot of them seemingly.**

ALAP: **You ended up promoting a tour of Italy for Breathless too?**

MAURO TEHO TEARDO: **Yes, I thought and I am still sure of it, that Gary was a quite rare person for being involved in both Ramleh and Breathless. Musical projects that couldn't have been more distant from each other, and I was attracted by his ability to be actively creative within both. It was back then scandalous using an electric guitar within an experimental context, it was definitely 'off,' but Breathless made great tracks and Ramleh too, that's definitely enough for me.**

I organised a few shows in Italy, and it was one of my first experiences in that world, and financially it wasn't a success, so I ended up having to sell my car to pay for everything because the promoters didn't pay up and all those typical touring stories, but I had to pay the band so I borrowed money from a friend, paid the band, sold the car. I never heard from them since.

BF57 - RAMLEH / AIN-TOW, Nerve
BF59 - RAMLEH, Hole In The Heart
BF70 - RAMLEH, Pumping

The highlights from this collection of Mundy's solo recordings, made during 1987 and created mostly with guitar and organ sounds that are so blissfully reverbed out that it touches on mournful melancholy, have been reissued as a 2CD set titled *Hole In The Heart* by the Dirter label.

ALAP: **Ain-Tow seemed a popular choice for inclusion on the split cassettes. Why?**

GARY MUNDY: **Simply because I got into the idea of split cassettes around the time they approached me, and also their tapes were quite short. I thought maybe people would buy the tape for one act and get into the other in the process. Similar idea to the compilations but you got more time to get to know them over a side.**

ALAP: **Can you tell us a little about those three cassettes from when you started working solo?**

GM: **These were from 1986 to '87, and apart from when Matthew Bower joined for Side Two of *Pumping*, it was all me. The Ramleh side of the split was called 'Redcap' and featured tracks based around samples I made from tracks sent to me by Giancarlo Toniutti and his brother Massimo. At that time I was getting very into sampling back around then and playing keyboards, more organ than synth. There's also a fair bit of guitar on there which upset the purists. I really like most of that material still and think it still stands up. It's also a stepping-stone from the 'electronic' Ramleh to the 'rock' Ramleh, as it was a period of transition, and also partly influenced by my work with Toll.**

ALAP: **Why did you opt to keep the Ramleh name when you started that solo work? Simply because it was known, or...?**

GM: **I had wanted to start up the band again but had lost touch with both Bob and Jerome and couldn't find anyone else I thought I could work well with, so I thought, why not just do it myself? The subject matter that I wanted to explore followed on from the last Ramleh recordings, such as 'Backlash' and 'Anything is Mine,' so it seemed fine to use the name, but the fact that it was a known name was obviously quite useful too.**

ALAP: ***Hole In The Heart* was dedicated to the writer Jean Genet (27), right? Why was that...some respect for his views on morality?**

GM: **I was getting into the whole morality and freedom of speech debate at the time, and Genet's work was very important to me then. I had recently seen his only TV interview and really liked him. He was a difficult curmudgeon who wrote beautiful, poetic words. Shortly after that he died and I felt I wanted to mark his death in some way. Some of the words are based on his writing, although the songs aren't about him or his work. It was just a starting point to create my own work.**

ALAP: **McCarthyism seems to be a reoccurring theme throughout Ramleh's PE work, most notably after Jerome joined. Why was that period of particular interest?**

GM: **Freedom of speech was always there as a subject in and around what we did, and so the suppressing of that through the McCarthy era (28) was always going to be an obvious point for us to pursue. What people will and won't do or say to protect themselves is endlessly fascinating, and makes you question how strongly you would defend your own position if you found yourself in that situation.**

ALAP: **Jerome was contributing the lyrics about methods of torture, right?**

GM: **Yeah, the 'Hand of Glory' lyrics were mostly Jerome's.**

ALAP: **The lyrical input got a lot more extensive around the time of the *Statement* album. At what point do you think you got it right in terms of projecting what you wanted to get over, content-wise?**

GM: **I wrote the lyrics to 'Backlash' and 'Anything Is Mine' and I wanted the words to be clearer on those tracks, as I felt it was important to get the words across since the subject matter was less clear than on the earlier records. There, the vocals mostly created a mood, and it wasn't important what was being said specifically — an overall impression was what was required. The morality-based lyrics needed to be clearer as it was difficult to supplement.**

BF58 - SIGILLUM S, Trance Flexure

Paolo Bandera (also known for working under the curious alias of P.NG5361) and Eraldo Bernocchi started their recording partnership in 1985. They would go on to create one of the most extensive and complex discographies of any of the Italian post-Industrial outfits. Mostly working under the Sigillum S name, their work had a heavy ritualistic atmosphere, maybe drawing thematic comparisons with fellow Italian esotericists such as Rosemary's Baby and Lashtal, and their cassette for Broken Flag was an excellent example of this. They released many private tapes, mostly of live performances around this period, before having their debut vinyl released via ADN in 1988. The duo, along with occasional friends, has had a sporadic schedule over the years, but is still working together. Bandera would create more blatant noise material with his solo project Sshe Retina Stimulants, as well as being involved in the production of the Italian version of Re/Search's *Industrial Culture Handbook*, whilst Bernocchi went and followed a more popular path, straying into electronic dance culture and producing soundtracks, collaborating with many other musicians, most notably Bill Laswell and Harold Budd.

ALAP: **How did the Sigillum S cassette come about?**

GM: **Paolo Bandera got in touch and sent me some really great, unique sounding material. Again, it was obvious that I was going to release something. The *Trance Flexure* tape I put out for them is another second-wave Italian release. They were a really good band. Really doing something different and interesting. I should have worked with them more.**

ALAP: **How did Sigillum S get hooked up with Broken Flag for that cassette?**

PAOLO BANDERA (SIGILLUM S): **Back in the early eighties, I had been getting as many Broken Flag early releases, most of the tapes, all the vinyl ones, from Marco Veronesi of A.D.N. After a while, of course, it felt 'right' to try and get in touch with Gary directly via mail, and after starting Sigillum S in late 1985, it felt 'natural' to ask him whether he was interested in releasing something of ours. He was, and he did it! We just thought that Broken Flag was some kind of appropriate environment for us to expand our initial experiments into something more refined and coherent, a mirror of our influences while helping to transcend them.**

ALAP: **It was your first non-private released cassette, and just predates the *Boudoir Philosophy* album. How do you feel about that cassette now?**

PB: **In fact, I have to say that I'm particularly fond of *Trance Flexure*. As you rightly point out, it was our first 'label' production and it was indeed conceived and realized as a first step of an actual bridge from the early, multi-dimensional tests of the first two 'Private Edition' tapes (*Sigillum S* and *HHHard*) through a number of other tapes and live performances to the 'true debut' on our still-favorite medium — vinyl — that's *Boudoir Philosophy*.**

On BF58, we started to push sound barriers as much as possible, trying to bend space and time through the pure power of overload and frequency manipulation, and at the same time, exploring hidden territories among the occult areas of the deep subconscious, the cultural taboos of sexual extremisms and the unexpected outcomes of fringe science, and even now, I think it really 'belongs' to the BF catalogue. We moved on, but most of the ideas were kicked off there and then mutated into the following releases. We recently started creating digital masters for all the old tapes and it's amazing how, some twenty years later, some of the approaches still work, at least for us.

BF65 - GERSTEIN, Death Posture

Maurizio Pustianaz started working under the Gerstein name as far back as 1984, and released a slow stream of 12 cassettes (mostly via his own Infektion Productions imprint), up to 1996. The cassettes featured ever-evolving styles of music but with an emphasis on the piano, an instrument that Pustianaz had been classically trained in. The Broken Flag release is an early entry in his catalogue and was released around the same time as *The Death Of All Fanatics* split cassette with Sigillum S during 1987.

For a short while Gerstein would become a duo, but for now it has resumed its life as a solo project, and Pustianaz continues to this day.

ALAP: **What do you recall about your dealings with Gerstein?**

GARY MUNDY: **Again, Gerstein were part of that second-wave of Italians on Broken Flag. The work of Maurizio Pustianaz. The *Death Posture* tape arrived in the post at the right time for me. I really liked it and was keen to put it out. There were a lot of Italians on Broken Flag over the years.**

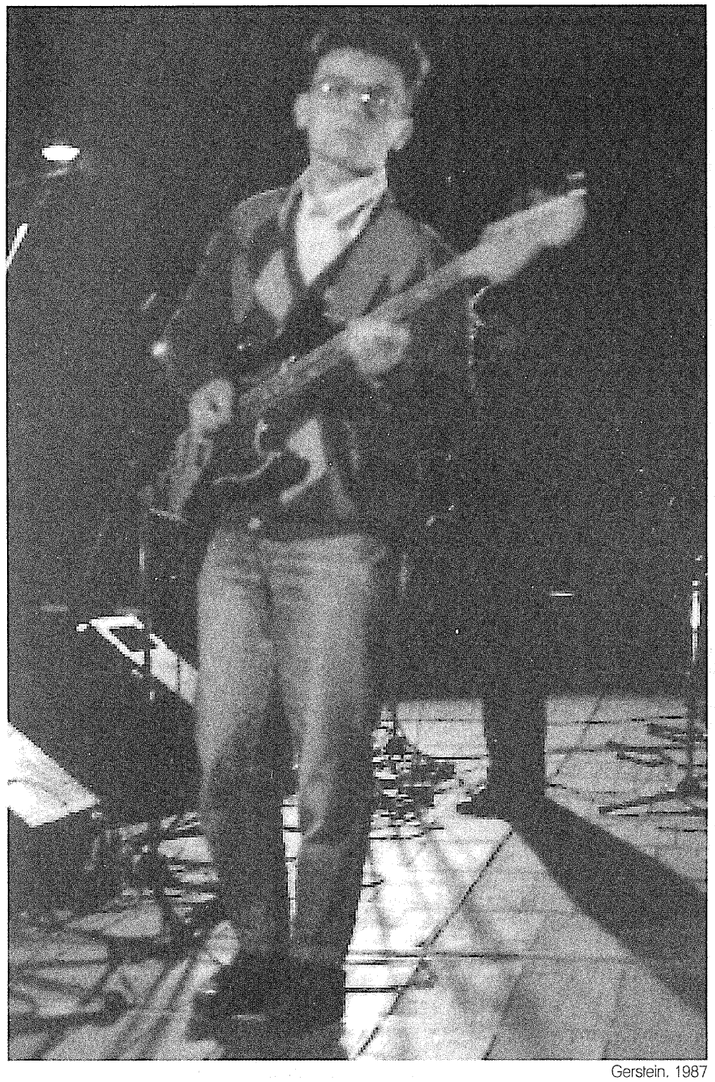
ALAP: **How did you find out about the Broken Flag label?**

MAURIZIO PUSTIANAZ (GERSTEIN): **As far as I can remember I knew of Gary because Sigillum S did a cassette for him, and I knew Paolo Bandera from the early days of Sigillum S, so I submitted the *Death Posture* cassette as a consequence of that.**

ALAP: **It was an early release for you, but you were putting out your own cassettes and fanzines prior to that. Can you tell us a little about those?**

(27) Jean Genet (1910-1986): French-born author, poet and playwright. Born the bastard son of a prostitute, he went on to become a vagrant, thief, and a prostitute as well. After many convictions over the years, he was almost imprisoned for life until intervention by the likes of Jean-Paul Sartre and Pablo Picasso successfully had the prison sentence overturned. Morality issues were a common theme in Genet's work. Start with 'The Thief's Journal' (1949).

(28) Senator Joseph McCarthy: U.S. Senator who rose to prominence in the 1950s for his relentless investigation of politicians, public figures, and, later, people in the entertainment industry who he accused of secretly being members of the Communist Party. Due to U.S.'s fear of the rise of world communism, McCarthy was given free reign to conduct Senate investigations into the dealings of so-called 'communist sympathizers,' making all manner of baseless allegations about the 'loyalty' of those he disagreed with. McCarthy would browbeat his opposition, carried along on a wave of the public's willingness to believe in imaginary enemies of the state, ruining the careers and lives many politicians, actors, and film screenwriters, more often than not for the crime of having different political viewpoints from the Senator. Although journalist Edward R. Murrow is often credited with turning the tide of public opinion against McCarthy, evidence also suggests that McCarthy's ever-heightening demagoguery and blatant twisting of facts and statistics were the twin strands of rope which he eventually used to hang himself. By 1954, four years after his infamous 'I have here in my hand a list…' speech (in which he claimed to have a 'secret list' of members of Congress who were members of the Communist Party), McCarthy was a veritable pariah in Congress and served the remainder of his term as a lame duck.



Gerstein. 1987

MP: **Gerstein started in the fall of 1984 because as a 17 year-old kid I was looking for a way to express myself. I had studied classical piano from the ages of 9 to 14, but I never loved classical music. After quitting the studies, because I moved from Torino to the countryside in Poirino, I started to play the genre I loved the most: New Wave. In this way, I started to play on my piano material by Japan, Soft Cell, Teardrop Explodes, etc. After some time, I thought to move on and start to compose my own stuff because of Marco Farano. He, back in those years, was hosting a radio show called 'Decoder' on Radio Torino Popolare, and he also ran a distribution under the same name where you could find stuff like Die Form, Vivenza, Force Mental magazine, etc. So I did a rough tape of piano suites mixed with television noises and I sent it to him. In that way Gerstein officially started and I collaborated with Marco a couple of years before doing a concert which was organised by DsorDNE at a school in Nichelino. That concert was recorded and released the year after by Misty Circles as the *Phlegmaticus* tape. You could say that Phlegmaticus was the first properly distributed release by Gerstein, but previously I did two other tapes. The first one was *Gerstein 1*, which had rough songs with piano and vocals, or chants with filtered vocals, and a toy organ, whilst *Gerstein 2* saw me collaborating with Stefano Franzin, a guy who was interested in the Industrial genre. With him I started to play piano suites with industrial noises in the background. Anyway, you also mentioned the fanzine I did. Well, Infektion Prod was the 'label' I did for releasing my own stuff, and also in 1987 I used that moniker for releasing three tapes of Industrial noise, and the fanzine was called Maelzel. I started to do a fanzine in 1985 with my brother Marco, called Snowdonia, but he wasn't too interested in talking about Industrial sounds so I did my own for three years and three issues, and I interviewed or featured Sigillum S, Coil, Ramleh, Giancarlo Toniutti, Dead Relatives, Amok, Nun, Rosemary's Baby, Thelma, etc.**

ALAP: **How do you view *The Death Posture* now, and can you talk a little about that cassette?**

MP: **The cassette was born as a collaboration with Massimo Mantovani, the singer from the band Thelma. He had released a cassette of a more ritualistic/electronic work titled *Rosa + Croce*, and that made me think it was possible to work together as those sounds had a similar approach to my way of experimenting with atmospheres. The main thing about my music, in those years, is that I didn't have the money to purchase musical instruments, so I was forced to use whatever I had besides my piano. On *The Death Posture*, I took care of all the piano parts and of all the cut-up sources, as I wanted to create a soundtrack for horror films using sounds taken from horror and thriller movies. My idea was to create obsessive suites where music was rising from recycled sounds. I always hated noise per se, so I liked the idea of using sources that people would find familiar, and as I didn't have a sampler or anything like that, I did everything playing and recording loops with two mono tape players. After doing my tracks, I sent the material to Massimo and the final result is the mix of my stuff and his. Nothing was added afterwards and I accepted everything he did as it was. At that point, we had to decide on the graphics to use and the titles. I chose the titles which could give you the idea of sequence, like a movie, and he decided to pick up the Zos Kia Cultus theme and the Austin Osman Spare drawings** (29).

ALAP: **Do you feel it still stands up well?**

MP: **I don't see things that way. Each of my works stands on its own, because it's of its time and born from different ideas and concepts. Since the early days each of my releases has been different from the following, and that is the reason why I have changed style so many times but remained true to the Gerstein manifesto. Basically Gerstein's music is part of my personality. I didn't and won't decide my sound based on following a trend. For sure I've always been influenced by the music I love, but everything is filtered and digested before becoming something that is released with the Gerstein 'seal of quality'!**

ALAP: **As you point out even towards the latter years of Broken Flag, there were still a number of Italian artists getting a cassette released. Can you tell me why you felt so much good quality music was coming from Italy?**

GARY MUNDY: **I think that good music inspires more good music and it does seem quite often that it works geographically. I think most people look to Japan or the U.S. for this stuff now, but for me in the eighties, it was initially the U.K. and then Italy that seemed to be where all the most innovative noise music was coming from. I think Maurizio Bianchi inspired a lot of people and fortunately, many of them did very good work too. I don't see too much coming from there at the moment, but certainly back then they had something.**

ALAP: **Broken Flag featured and released lots of quality recordings from Italian artists. Why do you think the Italians were so productive?**

GIANCARLO TONIUTTI: **I don't know if we can really talk about an Italian-particular prolificity. I think in those times there was a really huge development of ideas worldwide and many, many people started engaging in making this kind of music. Probably one of the reasons of a certain amount of presence by Italian composers within the Broken Flag catalogue is due to the fact that Italy, being a little bit late within the avant-garde scene of the time, just started to explode during 1983-84. Other countries, like the U.K., did it a couple of years before.**

PAOLO BANDERA: **I think there are two objective reasons: the first is Maurizio Bianchi writing about the 'scene' (which wasn't really there as such, of course, besides occasional friendships, at least in the early eighties) in a number of Italian magazines and attracting interest for Come Org., Broken Flag, etc. The other is, once more, the practical catalyst of ADN and Marco Veronesi linking individuals and projects to Broken Flag. Additionally, I have a subjective view, too. I have the feeling that the BF aesthetics were particularly linked to the cultural borders of the Italian underground because the social, very hedonistic, atmosphere of the time was pushing for some kind of 'counter reaction' in that direction, but that's my own personal perception.**

ROBERTO MARINELLI: **About 'quality' I have a different opinion, myself included, of course. Maurizio was enthusiastic about experimental music, especially if it was expressing deep dark hidden repressed feelings. He was writing for Rockerilla, at the time the most influential and rather well-distributed new-music magazine in Italy. He was the first to write about such music and sounds, in a period when youngsters were desperately seeking a new rock music, really without frontiers. Almost no one listened to the records but they read his articles. Vittore Baroni and friends did a lot of work with mail-art, sounds, editing, and most of all, building a network of postal relations between hundreds of active 'home-made' artists. So we discovered many grandchildren of Pierre Schaeffer and Throbbing Gristle's friends in Italy, among the others. We have always been repressed about new arts, education, and sex in this country. The Vatican has always been the real regime.**

MAURIZIO PUSTIANAZ: **My opinion is that the '80s, but mainly the first half, had been really creative years all over the world when people wanted to invent something totally new. It's a cyclic thing as the '50s had R'nR, the '60s Psychedelia, the '70s Punk and electronic music, the '90s Techno music and the '00s sees each genre mixing and contaminating each other, and in Italy there wasn't a scene really besides the Goth, the Punk and the Metal ones so in between things were blurring a little and in those dark corners people like me, Ain Soph, Sigillum S, Mauro Teho Teardo, F.A.R., Like Wake — basically the second-wave of sound experimenters — were freed from any boundaries and free to record new sounds.**

MAURO TEHO TEARDO: **Probably because it was a real DIY thing. Anyone could put out a tape and sell it at shows, meet other people and become active in the network. It was amazing and I have incredible memories of those times. I am not nostalgic about it but it was a very strong moment in my first steps in the music scene. There was a very limited number of people, and we knew each other. I remember it was kind of competitive too, which can't hurt too much. I remember some interesting records, like that Giancarlo Toniutti album on Broken Flag, or other people like F.A.R., Tasaday, Rinf and 2+2=5, but the one who gave a strong aesthetic vision to the whole scene was Maurizio Bianchi. Definitely an interesting personality whose records have an important role in the industrial sound of the eighties. Albums like *The Plain Truth* or *Endometrio* or *Carcinosi* are really focused and can tell you more about those years than many books. His music has a clear vision of how sound should be organised. The only thing I miss from those days is that need everyone had to make music that could represent himself, like a need to place yourself on the map rather than following someone else's ideas.**

ALAP: **Your early writing for various Italian music magazines seemed to prove very much to be the inspiration to many Italian artists. Any thoughts on this, or why Italy was so active during this period?**

MAURIZIO BIANCHI: **I remember that I liked to write some delirious sentences, accordingly with Lautréamont's poems** (30), **building the phrases, taking words by chance from a dictionary. Italy was so active because the people were bored with the typical Italian pseudo-culture and looking for a vent valve on something uncompromising and lasting.**

BF54 - JONATHON BRILEY, The Loss of Innocence
BF55 - DOG AS MASTER & IF, BWANA / AIN-TOW, At Last
BF61 - AGOG, Is No Man

As well as being a member of Points Of Friction (a band that also features LAFMS mainstay Joseph Hammer), Damion Bisciglia has, over the past 25 years, produced many works under his Agog moniker. His Broken Flag release is a raw early example of his sound collages, combining homemade instruments and radio snippets amongst the debris. Jonathan Briley (misspelled 'Jonathon Briley' on the tape cover) is as much known for his part as a player in the ever-changing lineups of Boston-based industrialists Sleep Chamber as he is for the selection of his solo cassettes that were issued throughout the '80s. He recently became an ordained Zen Buddhist, and as such wishes to put his past behind him. Although he still buys music of a dark ambient nature, he was adamant that he wouldn't discuss his old recordings. Sleep Chamber's John Zewizz's Inner-X-Musick label recently issued, possibly unofficially, a retrospective CD of Briley's work, entitled *I Am My Own Redeemer*, which features cuts from the Broken Flag cassette. The first side of the BF55 cassette features one of the many collaborations between two elder statesmen of the American cassette-networking circuit: Dog As Master was the work of Hal McGee, who also ran the Cause And Effect label, whilst If, Bwana is the long-running project of Al Margolis, the man behind the Sound Of Pig label. Both continue their extensive networking activities to this day. Ain-Tow players Robert Deters and Mars Wellink would become better known later as Vance Orchestra in the mid-'90s, but they proved un-contactable for this article.

ALAP: **Do you recall your dealings with Briley at all?**

GARY MUNDY: **Again, all by mail. Jonathan was another one of those musicians who just knew what he was doing and got it right. I rarely thought too long about whether to release something or not. They either spoke to me in some way or didn't, but Jonathan's work just had that special something that I look for.**

ALAP: **How did the Broken Flag cassette come about?**

AL MARGOLIS (IF, BWANA): **Hal hooked up the Broken Flag connection, and I believe that Broken Flag made the choice of who to pair us up with. I don't think I had any contact with them myself.**

ALAP: **Any thoughts on that work nowadays, and how do you see it fitting into the If, Bwana back catalogue?**

AM: **At first, I was thinking that this was the first collaboration that Hal and I did, but now believe that was not the case. Working with Hal was probably the most extensive collaboration I did in terms of being equal partners. I still work with others, but the collaborations these days tend towards me writing structures, canvases for sound painting, which, by the way, as a way of working did originate from works with Hal. I remember being jazzed by the work and liked the challenge of making something interesting. The tape is now running as I write and it still sounds pretty good to me. I kind of look at my overall work as a journey, so how it fits into the back catalogue I'm not sure, but we are both doing different work from that these days. It was formative, no doubt.**

When Hal was doing a Dog As Master tape for my Sound of Pig cassette label, we decided to try a collaboration, so one side was DAM and the other DAM/IB, which later became Bwana Dog, and that tape was *An Organized Accident*, and that collaboration became the most prolific of any I ever did. We toured, maybe twice, but definitely once around Boston, Toronto, Windsor, Ontario, Memphis and Brooklyn, with a couple of gigs cancelled due to car troubles, and that was when I found out that early Nurse With Wound was great driving music at six in the morning. Our last collaboration was called Peat and we recorded it at my place in Brooklyn, in the early '90s I think.

ALAP: **How did the Agog cassette come about?**

GARY MUNDY: **Agog was the work of Damian Bisciglia. My recollection is that he contacted me and I was impressed enough to want to release a tape. By the time this tape came out, I was trying to diversify the label a little. Agog's music was experimental but not in an obvious noise direction like a lot of the other tapes I was being sent at the time. He sounded like he knew what he was doing, which was pretty much the first test of whether to release anything for me, and obviously I had to like it.**

ALAP: **Can you listen to that "...is No Man" cs now?**

DAMIAN BISCIGLIA (AGOG): **The last time I listened to it I nearly gagged! It's the first time I recorded**

(29) Austin Osman Spare (1886-1956): British artist, writer, and magician. Although skilled in all manner of visual arts (sketch drawing, oil painting, pastels), we refer here to Spare's creation of a sigilized 'language of desire,' symbols and figures drawn in the manner of ancient hieroglyphs, a few of which adorn the cover of the Gerstein cassette. Zos Kia Cultus was Spare's personal magical belief system; it is thought to have had a great influence upon the 'chaos magic' movement of the 1970s.

(30) Comte de Lautréamont (1846-1870): French prose poet. His major work, 'Les Chants De Maldoror' (1869), is considered an example of pre-Surrealist movement Surrealism and also an influence on works by early post-Industrial bands such as Current 93 and Nurse With Wound, the title of whose debut album 'Chance Meeting On A Dissecting Table Of A Sewing Machine and An Umbrella' was taken from a line in the sixth canto of 'Maldoror.' He passed away aged 24.

something for someone else to release, but in trying to be 'professional' I mastered the release on what looked like the highest quality cassette around, but was actually just a fancy looking, cheap, normal bias cassette. The mixing was bad and the record level was way too low, so the sound quality is bad.

ALAP: **You see the Agog cassette as an anomaly in the BF catalogue?**

DB: **To be honest with you, I was never a big fan of the harsh noise/Power Electronics scene. I was more into stuff like the Croiners, Minoy, Adam Bohman, and cassette releases which were sort of like a Yank '80s version of Chocolate Monk, so I guess I was sort of the oddball on Broken Flag.**

BF60 / BFV8 - VARIOUS, Never Say When

Never Say When **was the third and final vinyl compilation Mundy released. Again, a run of 500 copies and featuring label regulars such as Controlled Bleeding, Total, Uncommunity, and Ramleh. The photograph used on the sleeve, which was of a praying mantis turned on its head to give it a vaguely upright human look as it stalks in the light of a window, is a very haunting image which supplements the music perfectly. The artwork was supplied by Cranioclast.**

ALAP: **The three vinyl compilations you issued seem to document each different musical phase of the label very well. Do you see them like that a 'state of label address'?**

GARY MUNDY: ***Neuengamme*** **was designed as a way of launching Broken Flag and I thought that by including known names that I liked mixed in with my own music that people who liked them would pick up on Ramleh and Kleistwahr too. Luckily they did and that album works as a very good document of the period. It really put the label on the map.** ***Statement*** **was different, as I liked the idea of a compilation where the artists had a chance to stretch out, so I thought we should limit it to four artists and give them around 12 minutes each. Everyone I chose to contribute were the ones I wanted to work with the most and the ones I thought would fit together the best. It's an all British affair, although that wasn't in my mind at the time and it's less of a compilation and more like four EPs stuck together. Lastly,** ***Never Say When*** **was more like** ***Neuengamme*** **— a state of label address if you like, with artists that I thought were the most representative of the label at that time. Controlled Bleeding and Uncommunity released a lot on Broken Flag and there were also other regulars too, but sadly, we never released any other Cranioclast material, although I distributed their records for a while.**

BFF01 - VARIOUS, 'The Soft Volcano Erupts'

ALAP: **That flexidisc was meant to have been issued with a magazine, right?**

GARY MUNDY: **Yeah, Distant Violins. An Australian magazine. The idea was that they would take half of the flexis and put them out in Australia with the magazine, and in England it would just be available on its own. The Australian group The Cananes** (31) **got in touch and arranged it.**

ALAP: **That Cananes track on the flexidisc is an odd one, isn't it?**

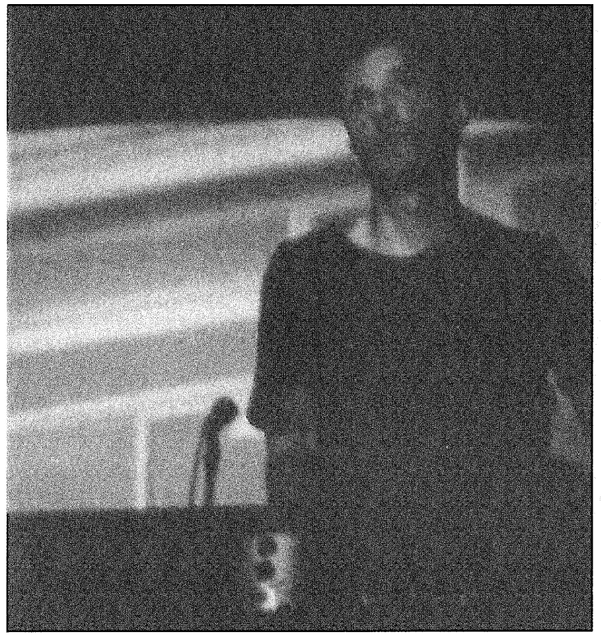
GM: **I did a weird mix of one of their tracks for the flexi. I was looking to change things musically at Broken Flag and that was one experiment I tried. It didn't quite come off, but it led me into new areas.**

ALAP: **Were you aware of the group at all before you got involved? They were popular in Australia, I believe. Another BF connection that went on to bigger things?**

GM: **The guy behind the Cananes came to see me at my house and we discussed various ideas relating to Broken Flag, his band and the magazine. Eventually, we decided on getting them to put out a Broken Flag sampler flexidisc and that I'd do a remix of a Cananes track for inclusion. I knew of them before that, but they obviously weren't a Broken Flag type band, but at that time I was looking to move the label away from its electronics background and just wanting to make it a label for good music of whatever nature. It's a curious sampler but it was surprisingly popular at the time. Maybe the label's audience was looking to diversify too?**

BF62 - S*CORE, Dumb Chamber

For many years, S*Core, the project of Tokyo-based artist Yutaka Tanaka, was one of the most visible Japanese artists on the international networking circuit, with a string of releases to his name. Over the last decade, however, he fell silent and has now proved impossible to contact. The ***Dumb Chamber*** **cassette was recorded in 1987, around the time of his first vinyl, the 'A Jest of Nature' 7-inch on his own Afflict Records label. Around the same time, after appearing on the third volume of Cordelia Records'** ***Obscure Independant Classics*** **compilation series, Tanaka was invited to compile the fourth in the series. This compilation featured only Japanese artists, and amongst all the post-Punk/abstract pop sounds ran more S*Core material, as well as a track from Man Decade, which was a band Tanaka was involved with and ran alongside S*Core for a few years. They released a single titled 'Eschatology' in 1985, and appeared on further compilations.**



Con-Dom. 1980s

ALAP: **S*Core is the only Japanese artist you released, but surely this wasn't down to a lack of interest from Japan?**

GARY MUNDY: **A lot of Japanese people brought records and tapes from me and there was a healthy noise scene there, certainly, but I was rarely approached by Japanese artists. I think a lot of them didn't need my help. I'm probably one of the few people not to release anything by Merzbow. Not that I refused, it just never came up. I would have liked to have released some Merzbow and Dissecting Table. I did distribute the latter's** ***Ultra Point of Intersection Exist*** **album, something of a noise classic around my way.**

BF63 - CON-DOM / NAILS OV CHRIST & A.M.K., Have Faith

Starting out in the summer of 1983, and at the time based in the West Midlands, the duo incarnation of Con-Dom (an abbreviation for Control-Domination) consisting of Mike Dando and Steve Downs would last a year before Downs' departure. Since then, Dando has spent nearly 30 years building up a body of recorded work that is of a consistently high quality. This reputation, enhanced by constant gigging, has seen him become one of the most influential and highly-regarded forces on the international Power Electronics circuit. The project's name indicates a major source of the motivation for his work, and like his allies in The Grey Wolves (side one features the Con-Dom project solo, while side two is a collaboration between Grey Wolves-associated project Nails Ov Christ in collaboration with L.A.-based project A.M.K.), the methods of delivery and presentation used caused (and still do cause) confusion amongst listeners. This ambiguity of intent has lead to many misunderstandings about the aims of the project. Con-Dom carries on regardless without any sense of compromise. Originally starting out in the early '80s as Opera For Infantry, the duo of Trevor Ward & David Padbury renamed themselves The Grey Wolves after the Turkish far-right group responsible for an attempted assassination of the then-current Pope back in 1981. Between themselves and with their many collaborators, they are responsible for many recordings of both dark, murky electronic ambience and also un-dynamic but raw power electronics. They are also mainstays in the Cultural Terrorism Network, an organization which takes in mail-art exchanges as much as it does music, and where a possible reaction to the work is considered more important than the actual work produced. The means used to provoke include flirting with far-right iconography; as such, this has dogged them since the beginning, much to the group's actual disinterest. Regardless, they remain unapologetic. Both Nails Ov Christ and Irritant were monikers Ward used throughout the '80s for his solo recordings. Like Dando, The Grey Wolves are a major inspiration on the contemporary Power Electronics network. Both outfits also have a tendency to appear on the same labels throughout the world, most notably the Tesco/Functional Organisation from Germany. Anthony King began as the project White Hand (named after the paramilitary death squads from the El Salvador conflict), but soon settled on using his own initials as a project moniker. He has produced many recordings of cut-up flexi-discs and turntable collapse ever since, and is also the brain behind the long-running but under-appreciated label Banned Productions.

ALAP: **When and how did you become aware of the Broken Flag label?**

MIKE DANDO (CON-DOM): **In the mid-eighties, I was investigating, making contacts with and consuming product from as many 'Industrial'/'Noise' labels as I could locate. I don't recall how exactly I became aware of Broken Flag, but it was probably via an existing contact or through a written reference in some of the literature I was becoming aware of and reading.**

ALAP: **So you made contact and a cassette was released?**

MD: **I saw Broken Flag as a high-profile label of the time, as I would, and was a consumer of its products and wanted to improve the visibility of Con-Dom. Broken Flag was an obvious label choice.**

ALAP: **The** ***Have Faith*** **cassette was one of your last split releases. Can you tell me about your dealings with Mike Dando?**

GARY MUNDY: **Mike and I were in contact for a long time. I liked his Con-Dom stuff and, of course, I'd already released Trev Ward's Irritant tape, and having the two on one tape seemed like a good idea. Nails Ov Christ, Irritant, and Grey Wolves were all different projects revolving around the same members from what I recall.**

I was supposed to do a Ramleh show in Birmingham back in about 1988, organised by and featuring Con-Dom, possibly the Grey Wolves, and Ramleh, which at the time was me, Stefan Jaworyzn, and Matthew Bower, but I pulled out at the last minute as I was having a few problems mentally at the time. I have some kind of cyclical disorder which is less interesting than it sounds but can be a bit crippling at times. I disguised it at the time with some kind of excuse, I forget what, but Matthew and Stefan played without me. I don't think I ever apologised to Mike, so I'll do it belatedly now. I think the show went well without me anyway.

STEFAN JAWORZYN (SKULLFLOWER): **That Birmingham gig was supposed to be Ramleh. Gary backed out, so me and Matthew did it as a guitar duo, pulling lots of idiot axe-hero posturings and so on. It was supposed to be a PE night. Ha-fucking-ha. I think Mike Dando put that show on, and it must have been my first dealings with him.**

ALAP: **How do you feel about your work on this cassette now in relation to your work since?**

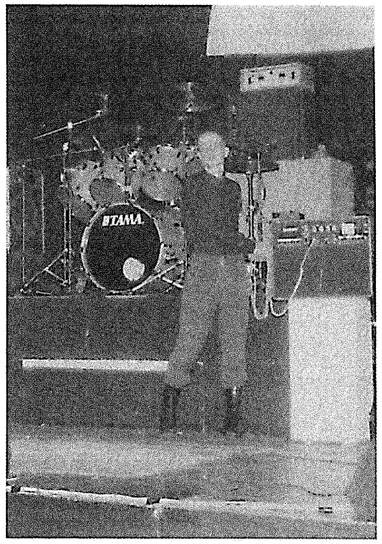
MIKE DANDO: **Obviously, it's a primitive work, recorded in a primitive fashion, live through a vocal PA into an Aiwa Walkman, in a friend's living room, in a terraced house in Wolverhampton, with the Asian neighbours complaining about the noise. I think there were only two, maybe three, sound sources, including a Casio, plus vocals through the effects. That said, I feel it stands up pretty well and the vocals in particular come across strongly, and the religious and faith themes are age-old Con-Dom concerns, which are just as relevant today as back then. And to this day, 'Jesus Penis' is one of my all-time favorite Con-Dom tracks.**

ALAP: **Of course the vocals play a large part in Con-Dom works because of the lyrical content, and you also rely on films and slides as part of a multi-media experience when playing live. How did this concept arise?**

MD: **Multi-media approaches were already being employed by the likes of Throbbing Gristle, S.P.K., Test Department, and, indeed, D.Mag 52. I cannot, have not, and never would claim any originality in this aspect. What was, however, clear from the beginning was the need to find means of expression which best reflected the multi-faceted, all-embracing, nefarious reach of the 'forces of control and domination,' some means of mimicking, reproducing something of the effect of those forces. High volume noise was one piece of the jigsaw, and proselytising, oppressive vocalising another, but it required an unsettling visual dimension and a confrontational, physical, personal presence to complete the armoury.**

ALAP: **Where did the influence and push to create Con-Dom come from? Prior to that, you were working with other experimental projects. Can you tell us a little about that?**

MD: **The two things are directly related. The other experimental projects to which you refer were Spontaneous Human Combustion (SHC) and Death Magazine 52 (D.Mag 52) which it became. Both projects owed debts to Throbbing Gristle, 23 Skidoo, S.P.K., Whitehouse, Burroughs, early Test Department, and similar. They combined conventional instruments — variously guitars, bass, clarinet, saxophone, and drums, albeit played unconventionally — with taped noise, short wave, voice loops, vocals and found percussion. Their preoccupations were those of their peers — murder, sex, magick, and perhaps most significantly from a personal perspective, control. Few recorded documents of their work were released, and none to my knowledge are still available. Both projects were active live, performing in company with Test Department, Portion Control — a London show which got reviewed in the NME — and at the Equinox Event, with Philip Best 'guesting' on vocals. The birth of Con-Dom came about out of the fractious implosion of D.Mag 52, the remains of which would join forces with Family Patrol Group, and a strong personal imperative to carry on and develop the noise/electronic elements of its work as a perfect foil to an emerging obsession with all facets of societal control mechanisms.**



Grey Wolves. 1980s

ALAP: **Trevor Ward and his projects like The Grey Wolves have been your longest-running allies. The relationship started prior to the BF63 cassette, but can you tell us about your ideas and work with them, and what keeps this relationship running?**

MD: **The longstanding and continuing relationship hinges on shared concerns and preoccupations, i.e. 'control domination' and 'cultural terrorism,' interchangeable in many ways but each synonymous with its originator. For Con-Dom, the concern is both with a rigorous documentation and examination of the subject matter and a modus operandi which wields the weapons of the oppressor in order to expose the oppression, ipso facto 'terrorism.'**

There is also commonality in an adherence to the type of rough, low-fi, analogue noise characteristic of the early-eighties tape underground, and in a stubborn reliance on a stripped-down setup, which places the emphasis on performer and message rather than technology and hardware. Both have led logically to a series of recorded and live collaborations over the years.

ALAP: **Nails Ov Christ was your solo project after Irritant. What do you feel was the major difference in theory and output behind the project?**

TREVOR WARD: **There wasn't a lot of difference apart from Nails Ov Christ had a bit more structure to its sound; whereas Irritant was more noise for**

(31) Better known as The Cannanes, the band were billed as The Cananes (two 'n's, not three) on this flexi. The band continued its hand-in-hand stroll with both noise and pop acts into the '90s, recording frequently for Mike Landucci's Blackbean & Placenta Tape Club label.

noise's sake, Nails Ov Christ was more noise with content. Also, as time went on, I got access to a bit more equipment and became a bit more efficient at recording material, though some would beg to differ. Back then, though, I was always changing the names of my recording unit or my label for one reason or another and 25 years on I'm still doing it. I recently changed the label name from Open Wound to Industrial Heritage after finding other labels, shops, etc. using the same name, and I've just decided on 'Blood State' for my new solo unit.

ALAP: **On BF63, you collaborate with A.M.K. How do you feel about this cassette now?**

TW: **Seriously, it was so long ago I can't remember what it sounds like and I no longer have a copy, but I do remember back then that any collaboration was welcome as it was another way, in those pre-internet days, of getting your name spread about.**

ALAP: **Tell us a little about the collaboration work with Trevor Ward and Nails Ov Christ.**

A.M. KING (A.M.K.): **Trevor was one of the first guys that I wrote to that was really into the whole thing. He had masses of releases out on his label and was really into the releases I was doing. We started the Banned Productions U.K. sub-label which he was going to run and I sent him a bunch of material for our collaboration, cross cut/cross continent, and about a year later I get this cassette in the mail, *Have Faith*, which is the stuff I gave him pretty much untouched. At least that's how I remember it.**

ALAP: **This must have been one of the first works as A.M.K. Why the change from White Hand, which was the name you were working under prior to using your own?**

AMK: **White Hand became a weight around me. It took forever to record anything as White Hand. I had to go into a studio and I would sit there for hours with no ideas trying to make a 'statement' about the injustices of the world using tapeloops. It became a chore. I started doing things with record players and cut-up records and left White Hand in the ambient-industrial pile, and never thought of going back to retrieve it ever again.**

ALAP: **When Broken Flag stopped producing the cassettes, you kept this release in print and later copies feature 'remixes' and extended pieces. Were you unhappy with the original recordings?**

MIKE DANDO: **After Broken Flag's demise, I was keen that the tape should not disappear, as certainly at that time I considered it to be probably the best Con-Dom release out there. Gary kindly agreed to let me continue to distribute it and returned the master to me. On listening to it two years later on, I felt that the recording quality and level of 'Get Right With God 1' was relatively weak. My control over the product gave me the opportunity to address that, which I did with the remix. I also wanted to maximise the use of available tape space, so added the appropriate intro and endpieces, both looped readings of T. S. Eliot poetry** (32).

BF64 - SATORI, Satori
BF72 - SATORI, Power of the Gun

Originally based in Kent, England, Satori worked under the name of Psychopath for a while, releasing a handful of cassettes such as *Whore Hammer* and *The Final Blow* before the change of name. Early on, the duo of Robert Maycock and David Kirby produced a very metal percussion-based sound often recorded at a disused air-raid shelter in their home-town, before adding more electronics. Maycock also ran the Dachau Productions cassette label, which also underwent names changes at various times, most famously to Mindscan Tapes. Satori's story continues to this day, but now under the guidance of Cold Spring's Justin Mitchell and involving Neil Chaney, of both Pessary and Dominator, but who also played in thrash-metal outfit Obliteration with Maycock, who produced an album, Obscured Within, on Release Emotions back in 1990. In fact, Maycock's love of metal almost, he claims, got him turned away from a Whitehouse 'Live Aktion' during 1983 for sporting a Venom backpatch. How things have changed.

ALAP: **How did the contact with Satori come about?**

GARY MUNDY: **I'm sure it was Rob Maycock that I dealt with. Again, I just liked what they did. It was a bit different from some of the other releases. Satori have been through various changes over the years and, apparently, have none of the original members in the band now, but from what I hear are still making interesting music. I'm the only survivor in Ramleh, of course, and there must have been about ten people in the band over the years, but to me it all still holds together. I feel like the Mark E. Smith of the noise underground or whatever the kids call it nowadays.**

ALAP: **How did you get connected to Broken Flag?**

ROBERT MAYCOCK: **I was already buying vinyl releases from Broken Flag when we sent Gary *The Final Blow* cassette by Psychopath. This was declined for release, but Gary said keep in contact concerning any new output from Satori. As soon as we were happy with a tape's worth of recordings, we forwarded it to Gary which then got released as BF64. We provided all the artwork, etc. for its release. The cover was chosen as the picture is a scan of a child in the womb and we felt this was fitting with our new musical direction.**

ALAP: **How do you feel about that debut release now, and in relation to your later recordings?**

RM: **BF64 was a c60 tape and Gary said he was more than happy to release it as it was, but he personally thought it would have made a better c46 by excluding the track 'Cut.' I had heavily contributed towards that track, so naturally I resisted this idea, but with hindsight, I realised it was far too long and didn't stand up to the quality of the other tracks.**

There are more rhythmic tracks on this tape and less of the full-on noise associated with the BF label. Compared with later releases, I think that this is a more accessible and easier going tape. Some might say it's not a 'true' Power Electronics release and I am inclined to agree because it's mainly like old school Industrial rather than Power Electronics.

ALAP: **Prior to Satori, you were working as Psychopath, so why did you morph into Satori?**

RM: **Dave got a keyboard, which broadened the scope of our sound. We knew it was a totally new beginning so we realised a new name was appropriate. Moreover, the name Psychopath was slightly corny. The reason for the name Satori was that I liked the name because there is a S.P.K. live track called 'Satori' from that period, and Dave being a massive Bauhaus fan agreed because of the 'Searching for the Satori' EP by Bauhaus.**

ALAP: **Over the years, Satori has transformed into another group altogether, featuring Justin Mitchell and Neil Chaney, with Chaney also being in the group Pessary, was also a member of thrash-metal band Obliteration alongside you. Can you tell me about the transformation?**

RM: **I can't really describe how Satori has transformed as I am not familiar with their musical output nowadays. Satori, Pessary, and Obliteration were running simultaneously and independently alongside each other, so it's not as if one project flowed into the next. Early Pessary tapes were released on Mindscan until Dirter Promotions took over with his future releases. Neil also recorded as Dominator around that time, very tongue-in-cheek it has to be said. Neil nicely demonstrated how easy it was to make Whitehouse-inspired music.**

ALAP: **What's the story behind the lineup changes with Satori, and how do you see that older material in relation to what Satori is doing nowadays?**

JUSTIN MITCHELL (SATORI): **It's a short tale, really. Rob Maycock and Dave Kirby formed the original Satori back in the eighties, but when Dave moved from Kent to Northampton in the early nineties, he brought the project with him. I was already in bands with Dave, one called Bruise and, later, Mouse and gigging quite a bit when Dave suggested he properly resurrect Satori with me joining him. The first things we did were for the Tesco label, a live album, recorded at their Tesco Disco festival, the material for which we recorded in the studios in Northampton.**

Around 1997-98, Dave and I started regularly recording bits and pieces working out a new studio album, including a project called Rook which didn't come to much. We were very busy, often seeing each other two or three times a week to record and drink beer. Dave then hit upon some bad personal problems, close family deaths, and understandably I saw him less frequently. Suddenly I had heard that Dave had simply packed and left, leaving me cassettes of the latest Satori recordings, and never contacted myself or anyone we both knew again. Indeed, a few people have contacted me asking if I have a contact email or number for him, but it seems Dave doesn't want to be found, which is fair enough.

ALAP: **You were aware of Maycock's work as Psychopath before it transformed into the Satori project, but didn't want to release anything by them. I guess you were getting a lot of unsolicited demo cassettes? Any of that stand out for good or bad reasons?**

GARY MUNDY: **I'm not too sure why I didn't release anything earlier of Robert's; maybe he never asked me? My memory is vague on that one. I got sent a lot of shit as you can imagine. People thinking any old noise would do. I'm not going to name names, but if you sent me something and I didn't get back to you there's a good reason why. Some drummer from a heavy metal band came to my house once to try and get me to 'sign' his band. I played him what we were up to at the time to try and get rid of him, and he pretended to like it, but I never heard from him again.**

BF66 - PUTREFIER, Cog Dominance

After approaching Broken Flag with his own *Birthbiter* cassette, the then-Wokingham-based musician Mark Durgan was offered a cassette release on Mundy's label. He went on to work with Anthony DiFranco, another new face on Broken Flag with his JFK and Ethnic Acid releases, and Durgan still carries on releasing material today as both Putrefier and under his own name, as well as assisting with The New Blockaders and related projects.

ALAP: **Putrefier mailed you a cassette. Why did you choose to release it?**

GARY MUNDY: **You can always rely on Mark Durgan to come up with the goods. The tape I released was just a really great recording. It's that simple. I've done a couple of shows with Mark in more recent times in London and New York and he's still got it. He knows what he's doing, whereas a lot of people are just charlatans. It's easy to do this stuff, but it's hard to do it really well.**

ALAP: **How did you get hooked up with Broken Flag, did you just mail Gary that Birthbiter cassette?**

MARK DURGAN (PUTREFIER): **I was compiling interviews and articles for a fanzine I was putting together around 1985 on experimental and Industrial music, and I contacted BF for an article outlining their current activities and Gary was very encouraging and supportive in supplying information. After a while, it looked like the magazine wouldn't get published for one reason or another. I kept in touch and moved into recording and sent BF the fruits of these on a cassette. This was the first cassette for both Putrefier and Birthbiter, *Beyond Scathing*. Gary was very complimentary of the release and immediately took stock of copies to sell via the Broken Flag distribution. A BF cassette was suggested and the rest is history.**

ALAP: **How do you feel nowdays about that older material?**

MD: **The majority of it I still like, and I would say it still stands up on its own even now. Some of it I find a little lackluster in parts and, maybe, a little one-dimensional. Certainly, the tracks could have benefited from a little more technical know-how and better recording equipment at the time. Most of the early period Putrefier will make it onto a double CD set that Freak Animal are releasing; this includes the whole of *Beyond Scathing* and the BF tape, *Cog Dominance*, as well as compilation tracks and unreleased material from that period, which I unearthed whilst listening back to those backing tapes. A little mastering and bolstering has also given the recordings a lot more justice and clarity than they originally had. The BF tape certainly had better recording merits than *Beyond Scathing*, but to a degree, this release was more of an experiment into overlaying waves of harsh tones and piercing atonality. The A-side of *Beyond Scathing* was one of the first things I recorded and I think it succeeds for me with the tension and foreboding it builds up over its twenty minute duration; the harsh filtered tones which rub against each other really shine through each time I listen to it.**

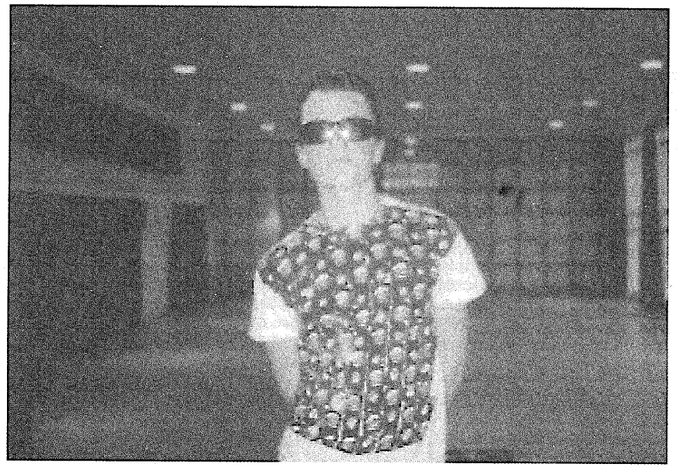
By the time I started compiling *Cog Dominance*, I'd got to grips a bit better with overlaying on this very cheap tapedeck I had borrowed. I was also using more of a mix of metal and synth sounds as a basis to build shorter, less overdubbed pieces that sounded slightly opposed to each other which were then joined together at random. With this release it was more about compiling material as a collage and achieving a sense of pace and diversity. Again, the first side of this tape I really like and I feel, on the whole, captures this. After the next release, *Prevail Against*, the tapedeck broke and got discarded so I took this as a message to say it's time for a change!

ALAP: **I'm guessing the *Cog Dominance* title is a little wordplay around a Whitehouse title?**

MD: **You guessed right...also, I was wondering about the ambiguity and nonsensical titles of the other Broken Flag releases around then, such as Sigillum S's *Trance Flexure* and S*Core's *Dumb Chamber* tapes. So it seemed in keeping that the title have both a sexual and an 'industrial' reference.**

BF69 - ETHNIC ACID, Birthbiter
BF70 - JFK, Woelf

Originally, Anthony DiFranco was one of Mundy's mail-order correspondents and would later became a constant in the ever-evolving Ramleh line-ups after a slow-paced but regular working relationship. DiFranco moves between the rock and electronics styles without any difficulty .This flexibility was hinted at on the early cassettes he created, with the harsh aesthetics of the Ethnic Acid material countered by the more musical elements of his JFK recordings. Both projects released a number of cassettes via labels such as Sound of Pig, Artaman, and Birthbiter, with JFK also making a couple of vinyl appearances via Kent-based label Fourth Dimension. Ethnic Acid were recently given the retrospective treatment by Industrial Recollections with the *Power-Works 1986-88* double-CD set. After a period of dropping in to assist with recordings by both Ramleh and Skullflower, DiFranco went on to work solo under the Ax moniker for London-based Freek Records, and as Novatron working for Cold Spring, as well as playing alongside Kevin Laska. Today, DiFranco is a player in both the variations of Ramleh.



JFK / Ethnic Acid. 1987

ALAP: **When did Anthony come onto the scene and what were your first dealings with him?**

GARY MUNDY: **Anthony sent me a cassette when he was 15, which would have been around 1987, I guess. I thought I had another Philip Best-style child star on my hands! It was astonishingly good for a 15-year old, or any age, come to that. The first time I met him was when I invited him to a Skullflower session. He'd never met any of us before and we were all about ten years older.**

ALAP: **How did you become aware of Broken Flag records, and how did you get connected with them?**

ANTHONY DIFRANCO (JFK/ETHNIC ACID): **Around about 1986, I became more aware of underground UK labels who were releasing experimental electronic music. This was mainly through various DIY punk fanzines that were doing the rounds at the time. There were a number of DIY tape labels around at that time, in the UK and elsewhere, but Broken Flag stood out for a number of reasons: they actually produced vinyl records as well as cassettes and also maintained a high degree of quality control on their releases. One of the first Broken Flag releases I got hold of was the *Never Say When* compilation and it really blew me away.**

I approached Gary in about 1986-87 with some of my material with a view to releasing it on Broken Flag. He liked the music and we worked together on a few of the early releases. In the course of recording I was trying to push things further, making it more extreme/over the top, sometimes blatantly ridiculous to see how far I could go with it. I think that I was probably trying to get to the point where Gary would actually reject the recordings as being too 'far out' to release, but he never did. Broken Flag seemed to exist in a terrain where anything was possible in music, which was a place I definitely wanted to be.

ALAP: **You were working as both JFK and Ethnic Acid from the start, in 1986. Why two projects?**

AD: **I started both of these projects in around 1986 and, pretty much from the outset, Ethnic Acid was more 'experimental,' whereas JFK was more**

(32) T.S. Eliot: Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965). American-born poet and playwright who is considered to be one of the most influential ever published. He would later become a British citizen and win the Nobel literature prize (1948).

'Rock' in sound and approach. JFK actually started as a kind of garage band with two guitars and a drum machine, but that changed soon after. As the music developed further the two projects seemed to evolve more clearly individual identities, with Ethnic Acid pushing more into heavy electronic territory and JFK moving into heavy-riffs and sampled rhythms. The two projects crossed over at certain points though; for example, I would take a section of bass feedback and distortion from a JFK track, then re-record it backwards and remix it for an Ethnic Acid track. Essentially, I saw both projects as being extensions of my own interest in music and platforms for developing my own sound.

ALAP: I guess you were impressed by his ability to have two totally different projects running whilst so young?

GARY MUNDY: That too. Again, he seemed very ambitious and forward-looking. It also seemed that he wasn't afraid of stepping on toes. He ripped off a lot of people's titles, which I figured was a deliberate ploy to irritate, which appealed to me greatly. There was definitely a real character behind those tapes, and there were a lot of ideas on them, too. He wasn't just some rip-off merchant.

ADF: I remember that I was working with this 'stream of consciousness' approach at the time, which meant that I would try and avoid applying any filters to what I was doing. I would just take the first thought that came into my mind and run with it, even if it was a title stolen or bastardised from another source, and use it as a launching pad for something else. A classic example was that *Birthbiter* tape: I really don't know what was going through my mind when I used the name of Mark's [Durgan] label for that release, and I'm pretty sure I didn't ask his permission, but the original sleeve was based around a collage that was themed around birth-control devices, which was meant to put the whole thing in a different context. Unfortunately, the artwork was 'lost' at same time as the sleeve for the JFK release.

ALAP: Why were guitars featured so heavily on those early recordings? It seemed unusual for a Broken Flag artist to use guitars as opposed to electronics.

ANTHONY DIFRANCO: Well, I've always liked distorted guitars and feedback, but it was at least partly driven by necessity. I had to use the instruments available, which were limited, and I had to try and get interesting sounds out of them. I had a guitar, and later a bass, a small amp, a couple of microphones, and that was about it apart from some effects units and a shortwave radio. I also managed to get hold of a drum-machine at some point, a bit later. I didn't have any synths at the time, and there's no synth on any of those early recordings at all. Quite often, I would try using anything that happened to be lying around: bits of metal, power tools, household objects, in an effort to find new sounds. I've got a reputation among some of the guys for taking an 'anything but the kitchen sink' approach to those early recordings, and I actually did use a kitchen sink on one of the Ethnic Acid tracks, as it happens.

ALAP: I always thought that the Ethnic Acid name had been thought up as part of your ideas about trying to be 'extreme,' so what's the story?

AD: Actually that wasn't the intention, but it's interesting that you would interpret it that way. I was at school when I started recording as Ethnic Acid, and the EA name is a play on words. It was inspired by a bottle of 'Ethanoic Acid' in the school chemistry lab. I chose it purely because it seemed to work well with the noisier electronic music I was making at the time, and it seemed to work well in that context.

ALAP: I recall you mentioning a possible cassette cover for one of your releases as being slightly 'over the top' that got lost. Can you relate the story?

AD: Oh right, the sleeve for BF70. I'm not sure if this is worth recounting but here goes: whilst I was in the process of recording the tapes for BF, someone I was trading tapes with sent me, unsolicited I might add, a couple of pages torn out of some German porn magazine. It wasn't a pretty sight as I recall, basically a scene involving a woman shagging two blokes. I found it amusing, but then thought it'd be even funnier to put an excerpt from this 'tableau' on the JFK cover. I think I must have been, privately, goading Gary not to use that sleeve as it was way beyond good taste and had absolutely nothing to do with the music itself. I sent Gary the masters for both tapes along with the artwork and awaited his response and, when it came, he says he's received the tapes but that — mysteriously — the artwork for both releases was missing from the package! I'm not sure that I've ever fully believed it, but I'll give Gary the benefit of the doubt. As a consequence, I didn't have anything to do with the artwork that actually appeared on the final releases.

BF67 - JFK / PHAETON DERNIÈRE DANSE,
Il Pach Preserve

ALAP: I'm guessing the split cassette with PDD was a Broken Flag idea?

ANTHONY DIFRANCO: That's right, I wasn't aware of what would appear on the other side of the tape. I think the guy behind PDD was Alain Basso? I hadn't heard anything by him since, I must admit.

ALAP: What do you remember about PDD?

GARY MUNDY: Very little, I have to say. It was a bad time for me. My memories of that time aren't great. I liked the tape a lot, though, but don't recall how it came about.

ALAP: That final year of Broken Flag activity, from 1987 into 1988, seemed to have a little extra U.K. presence, what with Anthony on board as well as Satori and Putrefier. Do you feel the influence of the '82 to '84 years was starting to take effect?

GM: It's possible, but I wasn't too bothered about where anybody came from. It didn't matter to me.

BF73 - UNRELEASED
BF74 - UNRELEASED

ALAP: Even though you never actually released anything for BF73 and BF74, did you have anything set aside or in mind for those catalogue numbers?

GARY MUNDY: Probably, but again it was during those days when things were falling apart a bit, so I honestly don't remember what they were. I was keen to stop the label and forget about it for a while. I also think my quality control was starting to suffer. I needed a break as I had virtually no spare time. I was losing focus and it was time to stop.

ALAP: When you say 'falling apart,' are you saying you were losing interest at that time, and had it become too much of a chore dealing with all those letters and cassettes?

GM: It was a bad time for me for a number of reasons, and not all to do with the label, so that was part of the reason for stopping, Also, I really just felt that I needed to get away from it all for a while to get some perspective back, and I felt like I was in a rut, too.

ALAP: Was this the point when you felt it right just to draw a line under it all and stop?

GM: I wasn't sure if I was going to stop for good or not, but I had to stop for a while to reconsider things.

ALAP: Were you still handling most of the distribution directly yourself?

GM: Pretty much. Some distributors took copies of the vinyl releases, but the vast majority of the tapes were copies to order at home by me. I seemed to be forever in my bedroom copying tapes, cutting out covers, going to the Post Office and the photocopy shops -- the ones that would still allow me in anyway.

ALAP: Where did you find the biggest market and how big a percentage got shipped overseas?

GM: It's usually been about 10% for the U.K., 40% for Europe, and 50% for the U.S. and Japan, roughly. The main point is that the U.K. has always been a small part of our audience, I don't know why.

ALAP: And all this seemed to coincide with the fledgling Skullflower starting up, didn't it?

GM: Skullflower was a beautiful release from all the hassle of the label. It made me realise that I should be putting all of my attention into my own music and not spending so much time flogging other people's work. Don't get me wrong, I loved doing the label but enough is enough.

BFV9 - SKULLFLOWER, Birthdeath
BFV10 - SKULLFLOWER, Form Destroyer

Matthew Bower's long-standing presence on Broken Flag can be traced back to the *Statement* compilation, which featured his outfit Pure, followed afterwards by the first incarnation of his (essentially) solo project Total with the *Hard + Low* cassette, which also made an appearance on the *Never Say When* collection. Whereas Pure was a group focused on getting the absolute most from performance situations, Total allowed Bower to retreat within his private space and work alone. The Anomalous cassette *84-87* captures most of this period's work. The *Hard + Low* material was given the vinyl treatment by Harbinger Sound as part of its 'No Publicity' album series, limited to 100 copies.

But around the same time that Gary Mundy had reactivated Ramleh, Bower had started to extend his work as Total by bringing in friends to assist with recordings, subsequently moving the project out of bedrooms and into studios. This led to much intermingling of members and project concepts at recording sessions, with the group of players using the name Skullflower becoming the most prominent. The main core of players, alongside Bower and Mundy, were Stuart Dennison and Stefan Jaworzyn. With this lineup, they created the two 12-inch records, both published on Broken Flag, drafting additional help from Alex Binnie, Anthony DiFranco, and one-time Coil player Stephen Thrower as required. Mundy stopped working with the band after that 1987-89 period to concentrate more on the latest reincarnation of Ramleh with Philip Best.

Meanwhile, Skullflower carried on recording and took their material into more riff-orientated realms, as documented with releases such as *Xaman*, an album issued on Jaworzyn's Shock Records imprint, which had followed on from their first 7-inch ('I Live In The Bottomless Pit' b/w 'Bo Diddley's Shitpump'), also on the same label. Shock would go on to later release a couple of Ramleh discs, including the *Blowhole* album, and throughout the early '90s, both bands mirrored each other by appearing on the same labels and bills. After a bust-up with Bower over issues concerning the mastering of Skullflower material, Jaworzyn would leave the group, soon after which Bower left London to move up to Cumbria where, as well as restarting his Total project (mostly recording for Majora), he would also take Skullflower out into looser musical territories, working with the likes of John Godbert, Neil Campbell, and Richard Youngs, amongst others. To this day, Bower is an ever-prolific, forward-moving artist who, after spells of working mostly solo under the moniker Sunroof!, also worked in the duo setting of The Hototogisu and now with his current main concern, Voltigeurs. Skullflower still drifts along, with Culver's Lee Stokoe adding weight to the turbulence. Recent sessions have also seen Stuart Dennison return to the drum stool.

ALAP: Can you tell us about the birth of Skullflower? Was it an extension of your work as Total?

MATTHEW BOWER: I started rehearsals with Stuart in '85, after a three year hiatus from Sulphur of Lions, and that became the 'group,' but still at the same time, I was pushing Total's rock recordings (Sutra). After getting burgled whilst living in Hackney during '87 and losing my 4-track, I just totally concentrated on studio recordings with the group as opposed to rehearsals.

ALAP: Do you recall the start of the Skullflower or Ramleh = chicken or egg scenario?

GARY MUNDY: I don't remember the chronology. We did a gig at the Bull and Gate just before we became Skullflower. I can remember pulling up in my car, getting the equipment on stage, and playing without a soundcheck, and then taking everything straight off, loading up the car and going home. I was in the venue for all of 45 minutes. If every show was like that I would play more often!

Matthew and I recorded together in his flat in Hackney before Skullflower, and I have vague recollections of a rehearsal room near to Guy's Hospital with a six-foot ceiling, and I'm 6 foot 3 inches. The first session at the legendary JTI studios was pre-Skullflower, with Alex Binnie playing bass and, I guess it was Matthew, Stefan, Stuart, and me as well. Matthew sang whilst Stefan and I played guitar. It sounded pretty promising to me, and then Matthew suggested that the band should be called Skullflower, and that all of us could also be Ramleh, which is how it was for a while, but it was unworkable, really, and didn't last long. Good times whilst it lasted, though.

ALAP: Can you recall the Total/Skullflower/Ramleh chronology? Did both projects morph from out of Total?

STEFAN JAWORZYN: As I recall, the first Skullflower rehearsal was the three of us, me with Bower and Dennison. I'm thinking Stuart might have come via

Matthew Bower & Stefan Jaworzyn. 1988

Matthew's brother, who recorded with us once and came up with the riff for 'Bo Diddley's Shitpump.' We weren't called Skullflower at that point, and I don't think we were called anything for a while. Next recruit was Alex Binnie to play bass, as Matthew was just singing at the time. I think he played a little 'primitive' guitar occasionally. Gary didn't come in till a bit later. I don't feel that Skullflower was directly connected to Total as such, as I always considered Total as Matthew's bedroom project. He 'borrowed' the name from a wretched duo I had with a friend of his when I first moved to London. I did play on one actual Total bedroom recording, some guitar that Matthew later buried in the mix.

We did a cover of 'Real Cool Time' (33) at our first Skullflower rehearsal — I may even still have the tape somewhere, must have been the only cover we ever did. Ok, I just checked my tapes and two of the earliest Skullflower sessions are labeled as Total! But the very first practice, and a live recording of one of the two or three gigs we did, during my time that is, is labeled 'Raiders.' The name was originally The Young Raiders, named after a Brixton rape-gang Matthew had read about, later shortened; it was really just a joke. We did all our recordings in Brixton and took a lot of drugs while doing so, the concept amused us and the name hung around for a short time but was never intended to be used seriously. So the existence of both of these units had no influence on early Skullflower as far as my perspective is concerned.

The first recordings were Binnie, Bower, Dennison, Jaworzyn and Mundy. What we did at first was, we recorded some Skullflower stuff, early versions of 'Slaves' and 'Wave,' I think, and I'm pretty sure Matthew only sang on these, then we 'became' Ramleh and recorded 'What Did You Expect?' minus Binnie. That was our first recording session at JTI. There was a definite element of 'floating' guests/musicians. Gary brought along Anthony/JFK, and I got Steve Thrower, then of Coil, to come along one night, and he's on a couple of tracks on *Form Destroyer*.

ALAP: Once Matthew started to focus on his Total work, you went on to play in live performances with Zos Kia, but hooked up with Matthew again as Raiders, and later, Skullflower started. Can you recall the chronological order of events?

ALEX BINNIE: I can't really remember the order. There was a whole group of us in various bands all living in Hackney in the early '80s. The band members and names were pretty fluid. We were just having fun, living in London, thinking we were hardcore. I knew John [Gosling], so I did a record with Zos Kia, and I guess Matthew asked me to play on a couple of early Skullflower recordings, and I was happy to oblige. We had fun, it was a good period of my life, but I knew Matthew wanted to take it further, and I wanted to become a tattoo artist, so I left to pursue that.

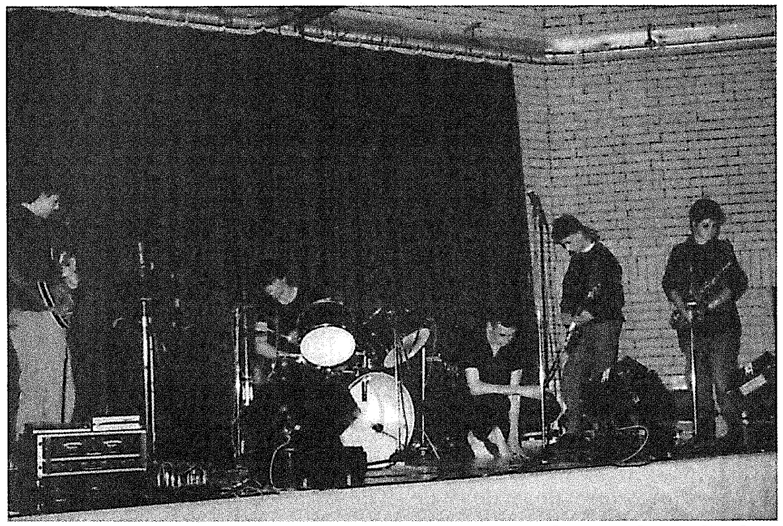
We still see each other occasionally and I even played violin with them in Brighton recently. I thought I was just coming along to see the gig, but when I turned up, Matthew handed me the violin and said, "We're on in 15 minutes." I'd do it again.

ALAP: When and how did you become aware of Bower and Mundy?

STEFAN JAWORZYN: I met Matthew when I was living in Cardiff. I think he was doing Sulphur of Lions at the time. He came over for some show that Alex Binnie and his pal Eddie put it on at, I think, Chapter Arts Centre. Binnie and Eddie were Kodak, and I was in a trio called Take/Flesh. Cardiff was

(33) 'Real Cool Time': Track two on Side Two of The Stooges' self-titled debut album (Elektra, 1969).

utter fucking hell at the time, Mongoloid City we used to call it. I can't remember anything about what Matthew did that night; I think his thing was called Jessica X. I met him a few more times when I came up to London to hang out with Binnie. I'm not too sure that me and Matthew ever really especially liked each other as such, our relationship was often pretty strained and we rarely saw eye to eye on artistic or aesthetic matters, though we did enjoy getting fucked up and taking the piss out of people.



Those Wayward Boys. 1981. Photo by Piers Carter

Can't remember how I met Gary at all, I guess Matthew brought him to a rehearsal sometime and that was it. Maybe Philip had introduced me to him previously? Philip was a fixture on most people's bedroom floors for quite a while during his homeless period! I'm not sure I even saw Ramleh in the early/mid-eighties, but I vaguely feel I must have, some gig on a Saturday afternoon maybe? Anyway, Gary is one of those instantly likable characters and I think our different guitar sounds worked pretty well together. It was a major bummer when Gary stopped coming to Skullflower sessions. I'd phone him every Thursday night begging him to turn up on Friday, he'd say 'yes' then not show! His presence doubtless alleviated some of the tension between me and Matthew.

ALAP: **You were working on musical projects in Cardiff before you moved over to London. Can you give us a little information on those?**

ALEX BINNIE: **I went to Art School in Cardiff and did a lot of sound work with my friend Eddie; we met Stefan there and did some work with him and his mate Will. There were four of us doing this heavy improv stuff. We had a practise room and would play all night.**

ALAP: **You knew Matthew prior to working in Skullflower. Can you tell us a little about that?**

STUART DENNISON (SKULLFLOWER/RAMLEH): **Yes, I met Matthew at sixth form college, Farnham College, when we were about 16 or 17 years old, about 1979. He had some badges on and looked kinda interesting and not long after that we became good friends, got stoned, and formed a band together called Les Fleur De Mal, after Baudelaire. We played Velvets and Stooges-influenced sort of stuff, but we were kids so that's okay.**

We had a memorable (drug) trip together and saw corn gods striding vast fields and devils riding bicycles...it was the most memorable psychedelic thing we ever did together when not playing music. We went on to art school and on to be in several different groups together like Those Wayward Boys (Velvets & Stooges and very early Bauhaus feedback stuff), and then A Sulphur of Lions (a fucked version of The Pop Group meets Throbbing Gristle and 23 Skidoo with plenty of feedback). We then went our own ways for a while. I formed a group called 00.00 with a couple of guys, Piers Carter, John Harding, and Alistair Peak, who was murdered about 14 years ago. About 1987, Matthew was doing some Total stuff and invited me to work with him again. That project turned into the Raiders with Stefan Jaworzyn and Alex Binnie, which then became Skullflower, or the first version of Skullflower.

ALAP: **The 'Rock' approach with JFK lead you to involvement with the early Skullflower recordings. Can you tell us a little about this?**

ANTHONY DIFRANCO: **I had a number of telephone conversations with Gary sometime around 1988 where Gary was discussing this 'new' band he was working with. I think he specifically mentioned that Matthew was involved, and I'd already heard some of the Total releases on Broken Flag at the time. Gary sent me some rough mixes on tape and, at some point, suggested that I attend a recording session. I'm pretty sure that the reason Gary invited me to the session was that a lot of the music I was making as JFK and Ethnic Acid used a lot of heavy, droning guitar and feedback. It had some similarity to the direction Ramleh and Skullflower was taking at the time.**

ALAP: **How was the session? Was it daunting at all to meet the other guys in the band?**

AD: **It was all pretty relaxed, actually. I remember Matthew was very friendly and made an effort to make me feel welcome and integrate me into whatever it was they were doing. The control room got more and more filled with smoke as the night went on. Gary wasn't partaking, but must have copped some secondary fumes — the place was totally enclosed with no ventilation.**

There wasn't any suggestion as to what would be required musically — the general approach seemed to be to just get together in the studio and improvise. I don't know how it compared to other sessions at the time, but there was no musical direction — it was kind of left to me to lay down some heavy riffs and get the ball rolling.

ALAP: **From your discography, it seems that you gave up your solo works once you started playing with Skullflower?**

AD: **That's not strictly true, as I was still working on JFK recordings while I was with Skullflower and then moved on to working on Ax shortly afterwards. So there was still a kind of continuum, but I did stop releasing tapes about 1988, when I left school.**

ALAP: **By what stage did you feel you had exhausted your time in Skullflower? Did you feel it was totally Matthew's group?**

GARY MUNDY: **Initially, I wasn't in what became Skullflower; I joined before it was called that, but they had existed before my time with Matthew on vocals, Stefan on guitar, Stuart Dennison on drums, and Alex Binnie on bass. I joined as a second guitarist. Binnie left quite early on and Matthew took over the bass. Then, when Stuart went AWOL for a while, Matthew and Stephen Thrower played drums between them, and I brought Anthony Di Franco down to play some bass a couple of times. But the reason I was there, which I had discussed with Matthew, was that I would play guitar on Skullflower recordings and Skullflower would effectively be my band for Ramleh recordings. We would split our time between the two. Matthew pretty much led the Skullflower stuff and the idea was that I would lead the Ramleh material. Matthew and I split the costs of everything between us. The problem was that members of Skullflower wanted the Ramleh stuff to be like their idea of Ramleh, and I was looking to change it and do something new, so it became a bit of a dead-end for me. Ramleh was never intended to stay in the same place for too long. Meanwhile the Skullflower stuff was going brilliantly and gradually we spent more and more time on that and less and less on Ramleh. I decided that I needed to do Ramleh as a totally separate project and thought that the only way it would work would be to leave Skullflower. I was in the process of coaxing Philip Best to do Ramleh, as he had been dead set against making that sort of music for years but was coming round to it again. In hindsight, maybe I should have tried to stay in Skullflower too, but at the time, it seemed right to leave. I don't work well being asked to play specific things, even though a lot of the results were great. Skullflower made *Xaman* after that without me, so I don't think they missed me that much.**

ALAP: **Didn't you let Matthew use the label name for those first two records, whilst he funded them?**

GM: **My recollection is that Matthew and I both paid half for everything, that's for recording and pressing up the records, with those two records I put out on Broken Flag. They weren't distributed by me, though; I think Southern dealt with most of the copies. After I left Skullflower, I revived the label from time to time, but made sure it wasn't anything on the scale of those early years.**

ALAP: **With Skullflower being your band as such, did you consider yourself the 'conductor'?**

MATTHEW BOWER: **'Conductor'? I generally proposed, and paid for, rehearsals and later the studio-time, so I definitely felt that gave me license to call the shots to a degree. Also, I thought I knew that if I didn't, it would just be a slightly more unfocused version of what we did.**

ALAP: **You worked with Philip too towards the end of your time in Skullflower, and the first fruits of this were, quite shockingly, The Worried Well recordings. How did that all come about?**

GARY MUNDY: **Philip had been sacked from Whitehouse in 1984 for doing the tracks on the *Statement* compilation, as part of the arrangement in Whitehouse was that the members should only record as Whitehouse, and no side-projects. Philip moved back to Bristol and turned his back on the whole scene for about four years and, I think, threw himself into the lifestyle that he had missed out on by coming to London so young. He lived a normal teenage life and got very much into certain types of more commercial-sounding music. I think it was a rejection of the past that had been cut short in a way that I think was very traumatic for him at the time. We kept in touch and I would sometimes try to gently persuade him to make music again with me. Eventually, he agreed but only if it could be a much more commercial-sounding record. We agreed on trying to make music in the style of the current Factory Records bands like New Order and Section 25, not pure pop, but far from the PE of old.**

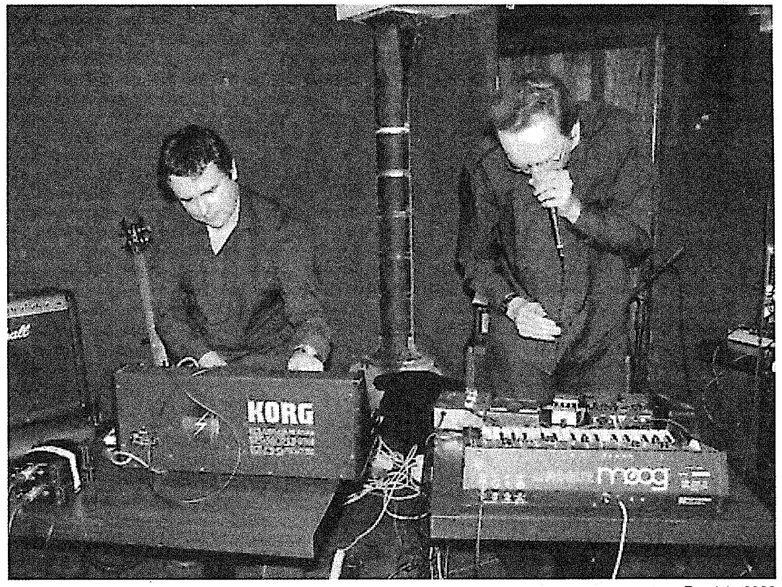
ALAP: **So you created all the music in Worried Well whilst Philip added the lyrics and vocals? The 12-inch sounds just like an under-funded New Order track. Do you think people were shocked by this, considering the late-'80s was full of electronic dance records made by people you wouldn't have expected to make such records? Was the 'Don't Get AIDS' record capturing the times as such, or just a reflection of your interests?**

GM: **Philip and I discussed the style of each track, and then I would write the music in the agreed style and Philip would add the lyrics and vocals. It was mainly the kind of music Philip was listening to at the time. I still had ideas of getting him to join me in a new version of Ramleh and this seemed like a good stepping-stone to that. I think that we were shocked, and pleased, that we had been able to turn our hands to a record like that, and Philip's lyrics are superb but it wasn't, ultimately, what I wanted to do. It was just a transitional project to me.**

ALAP: **There's an unreleased album's worth of material, which you claimed sounds more akin to Felt** (34)**. Was that pretty much your musical baby, too?**

GM: **We both worked closely on that album. It carried on that Factory thing, plus there was some music along the lines of Kraftwerk and, yes, a bit of Felt. We both loved Felt and, of course, I was used to making music more in that vein with Breathless, so it came together quite easily. We sent it out to a few people but didn't get any takers to release it and by then had formed the new Ramleh, so we quietly put the album away and forgot about it.**

ALAP: **How did that work lead up to the recordings that would become the *Grudge For Life* album?**



Ramleh. 2008

GM: **I sold *Grudge For Life* to Philip as a heavy metal album with no drums. Sort of a mid-point between *A Return To Slavery* and Slayer or some band like that. Once we got working on it, of course, it turned into something else again. Maybe 'Cut To Pieces' is the closet to the original plan, but it worked surprisingly well and it achieved the most important thing — Philip was back and hasn't really looked back since.**

ALAP: **This was also recorded at the JTI studio in Brixton. Can you tell us a little about your working relationship there with Ian McKay, who produced the vast majority of the Ramleh 'rock' records along with the early Skullflower material? He obviously had some input.**

GM: **Ian was a really laid-back guy, about ten years older than us. His tastes were more in a sort of hippie/Prog-rock area, but that meant that any kind of experimenting was fine by him. I never once recall him expressing any surprise about anything we attempted. Whatever you did was fine by him, and he worked very quickly too, which I love. I hate spending ages mixing tracks, and Ian was always ready to go when I was. He was great at getting sounds. You would say, I wish the guitar sounded more like..., and he would say, "What, like this?" and there it would be. We sometimes let him run riot with effects to see if anything special would happen and sometimes it would. That said, over the years the studio became a real shithole. By the end, there was damp everywhere, insects running riot, and the place really stank. It got really hard to get the smell out of your clothes. They ran out of money, basically, but I've never found a studio where it worked as well as JTI in those early days, though. I think Matthew actually discovered the place. He deserves the credit for that. Ian only worked nights, too, so it was all-night sessions, which were grueling but I think made the music sound the way it did, too.**

ALAP: **Those early overnight sessions must have been pretty grueling, right?**

STUART DENNISON: **Yes, the early sessions always took place overnight and with vast amounts of smoke, and we took acid for the early recordings, too. We just got lost in there somewhere and never came out again.**

BF75 - RAMLEH, Soundcheck Changeling
BF77 - RAMLEH, Airborne Babel
BF79 - RAMLEH, Elite Gymnastics

Mundy released a handful of cassettes during the mid-'90s, starting with *Soundcheck Changeling*, which was a collection of different takes of the *Homeless* CD material, with the title being an acknowledgment to Ian Curtis — one of the first Joy Division bootleg albums shared the same title.

The *Elite Gymnastics* set featured live recordings of shows where they presented the *Be Careful What You Wish For* material along with out-takes from the sessions for the Majora Records-released *Boeing* album. The cassette was incorrectly credited as BF80 on the sleeve.

ALAP: **Once the Shock Records had been released, Ramleh started to appear on lots of various labels. Was there no desire to kickstart Broken Flag again to take control of what was being released under your name?**

GARY MUNDY: **I found that putting out records (and tapes) was distracting me from making my own music and I wanted somebody else to take charge of that side of things. I still wanted Broken Flag to operate now and again when I felt like it, which it did, but I just didn't want it to be so time consuming again.**

(34) Felt: Popular 'indie' band who released many records throughout the '80s with their best one, 'Crumbling The Antiseptic Beauty' LP (1982), issued by Cherry Red Records.

ALAP: **So being free of that enabled you to concentrate more on the recording and playing, then? You were certainly more active on the gigging front.**

GM: **Pretty much. Playing live with Ramleh at that time was exciting and I started to love it again. We were fairly prolific in the studio for a while in the '90s, too. It was a very creative patch.**

ALAP: **But you still dabbled with the occasional tape, such as the *Soundcheck Changling* one. Why was that?**

GM: **Sometimes, we wanted to put out something low-key just for the more obsessed fan. Things that we wouldn't think of putting out as full official releases. *Soundcheck Changling* was alternative versions, etc. Some people preferred it to *Homeless*, though!**

BF76 - SKULLFLOWER, Sorties
BF78 - SKULLFLOWER / RAMLEH,
Adieu all you Judges

ALAP: **The split live CD seemed an odd choice for a release. Why was that chosen?**

GARY MUNDY: **We really enjoyed that show, maybe more than the audience did! The recording sounded great to us, too, and we thought it would work well as our part of the split CD. I really like that recording; it's not really one of our more popular recordings, but I think it works really well, particularly the version of 'Anaheim '73' at the end.**

ALAP: **After the *Boeing* disc, it all seemed to go quiet again. I guess Philip's time was getting taken up more with his Whitehouse commitments?**

GM: **We carried on until sometime in 1998, working on album which would have been called *Twins*, but progress was very slow and irritating, and there seemed to be a general lack of interest in what we were doing at that time. It goes in cycles and it wasn't our time. Philip was busy with Whitehouse, as you said, so we decided to give it a rest for a little while, and that turned into five years.**

ALAP: **An obvious one, really, but do you think the diversity of Ramleh's sound worked against you in terms of gaining popularity?**

GM: **Definitely, but it's what I love about Ramleh and the handful of other bands who believe in that diversity. Most people want you to repeat yourself ad infinitum, but I can't do that as I get bored too easily. I have no respect for people who criticise us for that diversity. To me, it's something to look for in a band.**

ALAP: **You were working with both Skullflower and Ramleh, so what did you feel were the differences in working methods and approaches to recording material?**

STUART DENNISON: **Well, that's kind of hard to put my finger on, but it was different. Skullflower was all improv, engulfing, exhausting. I got lost in the chaotic euphoria of playing, and, of course I did a lot more than just drums with Skullflower, playing viola, piano, treated/bowed banjo, percussion, turntables, tape decks, vocals, even some guitar. With Ramleh, it was just drums, and some treated trumpet once. I guess Ramleh were a little more structured, but with a great deal of improv within the process of finding these structures. However, I did have a lot of input in the studio with Ramleh as well, helping to find the structure for, amongst other things most notably 'Say Fuck' and virtually writing the structure for 'Slack Jaw,' too.**

BF80 - RAMLEH, Live 1983

A mid-'90s cassette release which paired-up two early '80s sets, one captured at the Equinox festival and the other being the material from the *To Theresienstadt* release.

ALAP: **What prompted you to reissue the older material via RRR/PURE** (35)**? Were you getting lots of new interest being taken in those recordings?**

GARY MUNDY: **I had had lots of requests to reissue that stuff and wasn't really that bothered at the time, so I thought that if somebody else would put it out it would get people off my back. Ron Lessard had released Philip's 3LP Consumer Electronics box set and I agreed that he would do the same for Ramleh. Eventually, for reasons I can't remember, he decided to put it out as three CDs instead, and that's why the CDs are all around 40 minutes, as it should have been three vinyl albums. I was just relieved to have that material available again.**

ALAP: **Broken Flag seems to get tagged as a 'Power Electronics' label, yet throughout the label's discography there's a wide variety of avant-music styles. Any thoughts on this, and are there any contemporary labels or artists you feel carry on this tradition?**

ANTHONY DIFRANCO: **I think it's true to say that a lot of the BF stuff pushed beyond Power Electronics, certainly around 1986-87. The Ramleh recordings around this time really impressed me because they fused elements of pure electronics with heavy psychedelic guitar noise. It was revolutionary stuff. There seemed to be an aspiration to make 'noise music' that pushed into the transcendental, without being shackled by the old clichés. I think that that's always been the goal and it's what we're still aiming for, really.**

I'm impressed by a lot of the stuff coming from the U.S. now, and over the last few years. There's some prominent players like the Wolf Eyes guys, Dominick Fernow, and Carlos Giffoni, but there's also a hell of a lot more out there, bubbling under the surface. You can really sense the energy and enthusiasm behind the music and if there's any tradition worth carrying on then that's the one that counts.

GARY MUNDY: **It's always frustrating when you get known for one thing and everything else gets either ignored or bracketed with stuff that it didn't really belong with, but I'd rather be known for something than nothing, I suppose.**

ALAP: **How do you view that 'second wave' of Power Electronics, like the Grey Wolves and Con-Dom, do you feel they took the original idea forward, and what about those artists that work under that genre nowadays?**

GM: **I had lost interest in Power Electronics really by that time, although Mike [Dando] and Trevor [Ward] were great people and I certainly had no problem with what they were doing; it just wasn't where I was musically at the time. They continued to fly the flag for far longer than I did and are maybe more responsible than me for the large amount of modern PE outfits. I'm enjoying making that kind of music again, at the moment, but I'm still doing the guitar-based music, too. It finally felt right to do some electronic music again. I'm not too up on who is doing what these days, but a lot of what I've heard sounds interesting. We are still working using mainly analogue equipment, whereas most of the new artists use mainly digital. The digital stuff just doesn't appeal to me as much as it's less atmospheric and a lot of Ramleh is about atmosphere.**

ALAP: **Have you investigated the newer works from Bianchi, Zoppo, or indeed any of the old artists you used to work with? Tim Gane would be the most public one, I guess. Of course Matthew and Philip, too.**

GM: **I've heard some of the more recent works of old BF artists. Generally they are good, but they don't always excite me like the early work. Pierpaolo Zoppo sent me a good 7-inch single a while back, though. I liked a lot of Tim's Stereolab work, particularly that 'Simple Headphone Mind' 12-inch with Nurse With Wound; that was really great. Matthew is in a world of his own, in a good way, and I would love to work with him again one day. He releases so much it's hard to keep up, but he's still obviously in love with what he's doing and he's never dull. Philip has been writing the greatest lyrics of his life, and I'm really enjoying working with Anthony again at the moment. I had an abortive attempt at starting a band with Stefan, about 1999, with Tony from Ascension and a friend of Stefan's called, I think, Charles on bass. We had one rehearsal which didn't go too well and Stefan said he didn't want to try again so we gave up. I have the tape somewhere, about five minutes of it is good. It didn't work out, sadly, but Stefan's done some great work as Ascension. Maybe one day we might be able to find a way to work together. I'm much more open to the idea of collaborations with people from my past now than I used to be, so long as I have my own projects that I can control as well.**

ALAP: **How much do you feel you need to control the Ramleh works, inasmuch as giving the other players pointers?**

GM: **I expect people to be as enthusiastic as me and if people don't get where I'm coming from, I can get quite frustrated, but I've been lucky with who I've worked with and I like people to be free to express themselves, so long as I don't violently disagree with their ideas. Philip and I had a great working relationship, and the latest stuff with Anthony is taking us to some amazing places now. Generally I vote with my feet. If it isn't working I put things aside for a while, sometimes for years.**

ALAP: **Having spent some time away from the Ramleh/Skullflower axis to focus on your own works as Ax and Novatron, you're back now working with Ramleh in both 'versions' of the group. How do you see this developing?**

ANTHONY DIFRANCO: **It's actually a really interesting phase for the band at the moment, lots of inspiration and possibilities. The main focus of our attention at the moment is that we're working on a new Ramleh album, which we hope will see release in 2010** (36)**.**

There's also the recent 10-inch vinyl release on Steve Meixner's Black Rose label, featuring two new tracks. Both of these releases are recorded in a 'Rock' band formation with myself, Gary, and Martyn Watts on drums. Beyond this, we're planning to record a new electronic Ramleh album. That'll be the next major recording project after the current one. There are also a number of Ramleh reissues planned for the coming year or so that will pretty much cover every phase of the group's history.

ALAP: **Were you surprised at how popular that V.O.D. box set was, as it sold out pretty quickly?**

FRANK MAIER (VINYL-ON-DEMAND): **Yes, I was quite surprised and astonished. I knew it was something that quite a few people had been waiting for, but that it ended up so popular I didn't expect. Usually items get sold out after six to 12 months, so actually there's enough time for everyone to find out about it and consider buying, but this one sold out on preorders. The Broken Flag box has also been one of the reasons why I increased the edition sizes to 600, since it is more than frustrating to say 'Sorry, sold out' to all those that found out about it too late and now must pay big prices. That really makes no sense because actually I wanted to provide a cheap alternative to the expensive originals and now my reissues even end up expensive.**

The box is a beautiful reminder that I indeed need to consider reissuing some releases, even if it will 'hurt' the collectors, but it needs to be rationally driven, not only emotionally.

ALAP: **With regards to representing the older works again with the V.O.D. set and the *Awake!* CDs, how much 'revisionism' do you think is needed in terms of repackaging the artwork, or debunking a few myths? I know you wanted to avoid the Nazi imagery for starters. Why?**

GARY MUNDY: **Many of the things that we did were of their time. They made sense at the time they were done and taken out of that context, sometimes, it doesn't work the same way, so a degree of repackaging is necessary, I think. The early '80s was a weird time, and unless you were there, a lot of what we were doing will seem hard to fathom.**

ALAP: **Is there anything you feel, in retrospect, that you could have done better or differently, or, indeed, something you shouldn't have done at all? I'm thinking about the releases and packages. Do you see a missed opportunity anywhere in the Ramleh saga?**

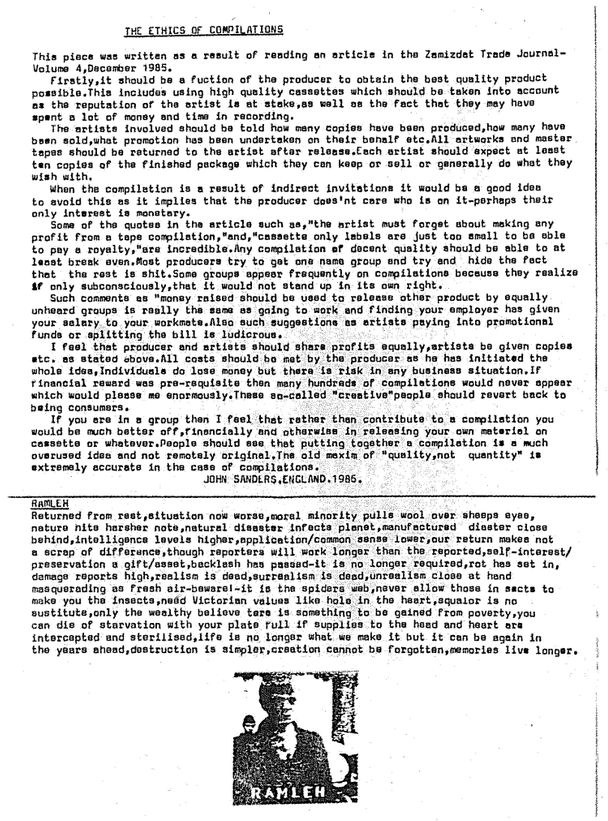
GM: **I wish we played more live early on, and we never got to play outside of England. I don't really have any major regrets, though, and I think, looking back, it's a good body of work.**

ALAP: **Were there any of the cassettes that you wished you released as vinyl for whatever reason? Any particular favorites from the back catalogue?**

GM: **Ideally, I would have released everything on vinyl. There was just wasn't the time or money, but with hindsight, it all seems to have worked quite nicely. Some of the compilations would have been good vinyl releases, like *Morality*. That would have looked great as a vinyl album. I would've loved to put out full-length albums by Uncommunity, Controlled Bleeding, Total, and JFK/Ethnic Acid. A four LP boxed set of the early Italian work would be great, too, with an album each from MB, Mauthausen Orchestra, Toniutti, and Swastika Kommando, but, I'm happy with it and the way it was done and people seem to love it just the way it was, so there's no point, or need, to say 'if only,' I suppose.**

ALAP: **How do you view the 'legend' of Ramleh that's been built up over the years? We have people today talking about a Broken Flag 'sound' and 'aesthetic.' You've seemed genuinely surprised when we've talked about it before.**

GM: **I've just done what I've done over the years. Generally, it's been unpopular at the time and more popular once we've moved on to something else, so I suppose it shouldn't surprise me that the early stuff is more popular now than ever. It's 25 years old. I like it, but I liked it then when most people didn't, and I'm glad people like it, so long as they don't tell me it's better than what we do now!**



THE ETHICS OF COMPILATIONS

This piece was written as a result of reading an article in the Zamizdat Trade Journal-Volume 4,December 1985.

Firstly,it should be a fuction of the producer to obtain the best quality product possible.This includes using high quality cassettes which should be taken into account as the reputation of the artist is at stake,as well as the fact that they may have spent a lot of money and time in recording.

The artists involved should be told how many copies have been produced,how many have been sold,what promotion has been undertaken on their benalf etc,All artworks and master tapes should be returned to the artist after release.Each artist should expect at least ten copies of the finished package which they can keep or sell or generally do what they wish with.

When the compilation is a result of indirect invitations it would be a good idea to avoid this as it implies that the producer does'nt care who is on it-perhaps their only interest is monetary.

Some of the quotes in the article such as,"the artist must forget about making any profit from a tape compilation,"and,"cassette only labels are just too small to be able to pay a royalty,"are incredible.Any compilation of decent quality should be able to at least break even.Most producers try to get one name group and try and hide the fact that the rest is shit.Some groups appear frequently on compilations because they realize if only subconsciously,that it would not stand up in its own right.

Such comments as "money raised should be used to release other product by equally unheard groups is really the same as going to work and finding your employer has given your salmry to your workmate.Also such suggestions as artists paying into promotional funds or splitting the bill is ludicrous.

I feel that producer and artists should share profits equally,artists be given copies etc. as stated above.All costs should be met by the producer as he has initiated the whole idea,Individuals do lose money but there is risk in any business situation.If financial reward was pre-requisite then many hundreds of compilations would never appear which would please me enormously.These so-called "creative"people should revert back to being consumers.

If you are in a group then I feel that rather than contribute to a compilation you would be much better off,financially and otherwise in releasing your own material on cassette or whatever.People should see that putting together a compilation is a much overused idea and not remotely original.The old maxim of "quality,not quantity" is extremely accurate in the case of compilations.

JOHN SANDERS,ENGLAND.1986.

RAMLEH

Returned from rest,situation now worse,moral minority pulls wool over sheeps eyes, nature hits harsher note,natural disaster infects planet,manufactured disster close behind,intelligence levels higher,application/common sense lower,our return makes not a scrap of difference,though reporters will work longer than the reported,self-interest/ preservation a gift/asset,backlash has passed-it is no longer required,rot has set in, damage reports high,realism is dead,surrealism is dead,unrealism close at hand masquerading as fresh air-beware!-it is the spiders web,never allow those in sects to make you the insects,need Victorian values like hole in the heart,squalor is no sustitute,only the wealthy believe tere is something to be gained from poverty,you can die of starvation with your plate full if supplies to the head and heart are intercepted and sterilised,life is no longer what we make it but it can be again in the years ahead,destruction is simpler,creation cannot be forgotten,memories live longer.

EVEN WHEN 2
KASINO BERN
Burgerrats-Saal
Dienstag, 17. Sept. 1918, abends 8 Uhr
Zweites und letztes Konzert
KLINGLER-QUARTETT
Brahms-Abend
Karten zu Frs. 5.-, 4.-, 3.-, 2.- im Vorverkauf bei Ferd. Wyss, Buchhandlung und an der Abendkasse ab 7 Uhr
Konzertdirektion: Musikhaus Hüni, Zürich

Natural Disasters
Adolf Woelfli

(35) 'We Created It, Let's Take It Over, Vols. I, II, and III:' Three single CDs released on PURE. These collections featured a considerable amount of early Ramleh material, including the 'The'Hand of Glory' 7-inch.

(36) 'Valediction': The first new full-length Ramleh release in Power Electronics mode, released on CD during 2009 on Second Layer Records.

CLASSIC ALBUMS

THE LEMON KITTENS
We Buy A Hammer For Daddy
BY STEVE UNDERWOOD

It looked fantastic. I thought I had discovered that clandestine branch of anarcho-punk that I had longed for. With no pointers offered out from the obscure black and white imagery of the sleeve, the lack of any sixth-form political diatribe, no contact address or pictures of the artists, and best of all with that title, the compilation record *Hoisting The Black Flag* yielded nothing but mystery. It seemed like an ideal calling to this serious black-clad sixteen year old youth who was more accustomed to hearing the strains of utopian ideologists wishing the world was one great big group-hug just waiting to happen. None of the names of the bands featured on the album, such as Nurse With Wound, Whitehouse, or Mental Aardvarks, meant anything to me, apart from The Lemon Kittens, who I knew from The Apostles and their cover version/adaptation of a Kittens' track on their *Topics For Discussion* demo cassette that year. Even with my heavy leaning towards the experimental avant-punk nature of Alternative TV, along with the more abstract material Crass Records had put out, this compilation was still an unexpected shock. Only the lead track by The Lemon Kittens, with its bizarre mix-up of tape loops, scrapes, tinkles and child-like vocals, making any real initial imprint on my eager mind. It was the most intriguing of introductions.

Some months later, during the Spring of 1983, whilst on a visit to the same store to grab a copy of The Mob's newly-released *Let The Tribe Increase* album, a chance flick through the second-hand racks pulled up the *We Buy A Hammer For Daddy* record. This was the band's debut album. Its dark green sleeve was a canvas for some lurid pink scribbled image, but was little in the way of a beckoning. But after blowing a good chunk of my £25 a week paypacket, I went back to my suburban bedroom a happy man, clutching two records that allowed some colour to seep into the drab monochrome polemic of my teenage record collection.

Even being slightly more clued-up about the duo of Karl Blake and Danielle Dax, they were still speaking in tongues to me, but I became totally engrossed. The album is accessible only because it is simply broken down into songs, yet unapproachable because I had no signposts to follow onto this alien turf, with both players utilising an equipment list that should have made me run a mile. Alongside the regulars of guitar, bass, and drums are oddities like penny whistles and squeeze boxes, which get twisted into this labyrinth of madness. Trying to pick out any conventional marker was as pointless as it would be unrewarding.

The album holds many twists and turns for the listener, with the benchmark for the first side being set by the track 'Small Mercies,' which sets about turning a disturbing tale of domestic violence on its head, with Dax playing the role of victim as she screams and whispers, convinced she deserves her place "because he tells me to," as a procession of mournful thuds, screeches and wails walks on by, turning a blind eye. The vocal gymnastics are caught best on the lullaby of 'Wrist Job,' showcasing the at-times shrieking but nursery-rhyme simplicity of the vocal range, which constantly has the feeling of lurking menace hanging over it. The menace comes to the fore with Blake's vocals on the track '(Afraid Of Being) Bled By Leeches.' And these are the easiest ports of entry into this disturbing playground.

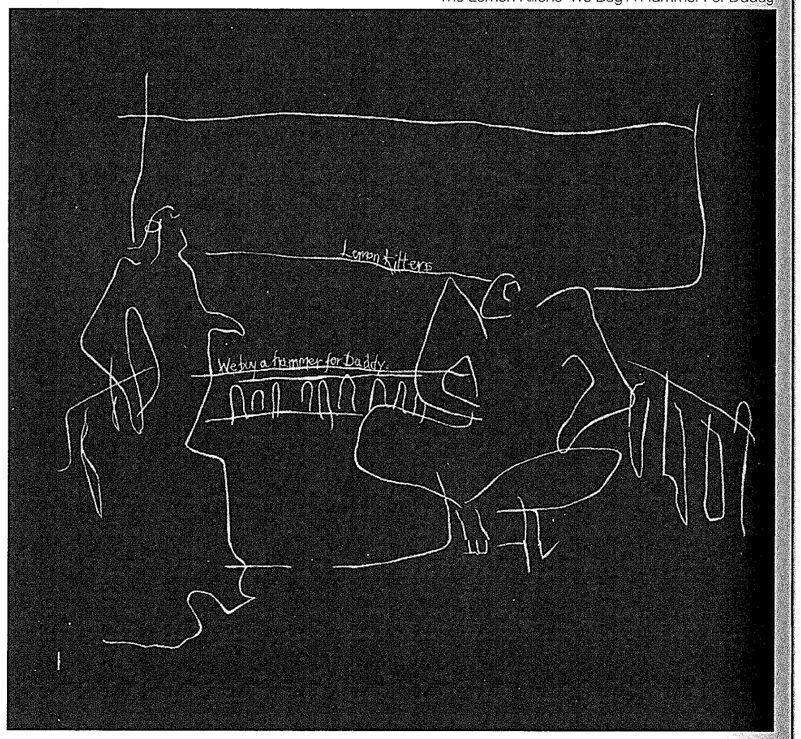
'These Men of Old England' is a sad lament for a decaying nation still wrapped up in awe of its own history whilst there are "sharks circling" the adrift, slowly sinking raft. Some sounds become familiar throughout the duration of the album, such as the stabs from the saxophone and the guitar interjections that threaten to cut loose with some metal-esque fingerwork (Blake always admitted that Sabbath was a major influence). But the intrusion is always beaten back down into the obviously contrived but contorted mesh, pulling together many strands of avant-garde thought but refusing to sit still with them. Even today upon relistening, I'm still picking out moments I had never caught before.

Blake and Dax claimed the whole album was conceived over the space of two weekends, including the writing of most of the material, but some pieces actually date as far back as the end of 1978. They lifted the album's title from one of the popular series of children's books published by Ladybird. The album went on to shift two pressings of 1,500 copies, the first wiped out within a couple of months, most of them being shipped over to Japan. It was one of United Dairies biggest selling titles.

Thankfully, I never saw The Lemon Kittens live, as I suspect the art-school antics of performing in body paint, loincloths, and little else — amongst other Virgin Prunes-esque theatrics — would've made an inverted snob like myself dismiss them as too arty and, as such, middle class. (My battle-lines had long already been drawn, albeit incorrectly.) Even though the band's recordings featured just the duo for the most part, live performances saw them draft in other players, most notably, and regularly, Mike Barnes and Ian Sturgess from The Walking Floors (whose main claim to fame was a track on the Colin Potter-curated *We Couldn't Agree On A Title* compilation, followed by an organ-driven shuffle of a 45 — Barnes would later go on to write a biography on Captain Beefheart) and also Mark Perry of ATV (also playing alongside Blake in The Reflections), who sat in on drums for a few months but left as, according to an interview published in Tone Death, Dax had wanted all the band members to (un)dress the same and Perry had refused. (The band insisted that the travel between London and Reading for rehearsals was the real reason for Perry's departure.)

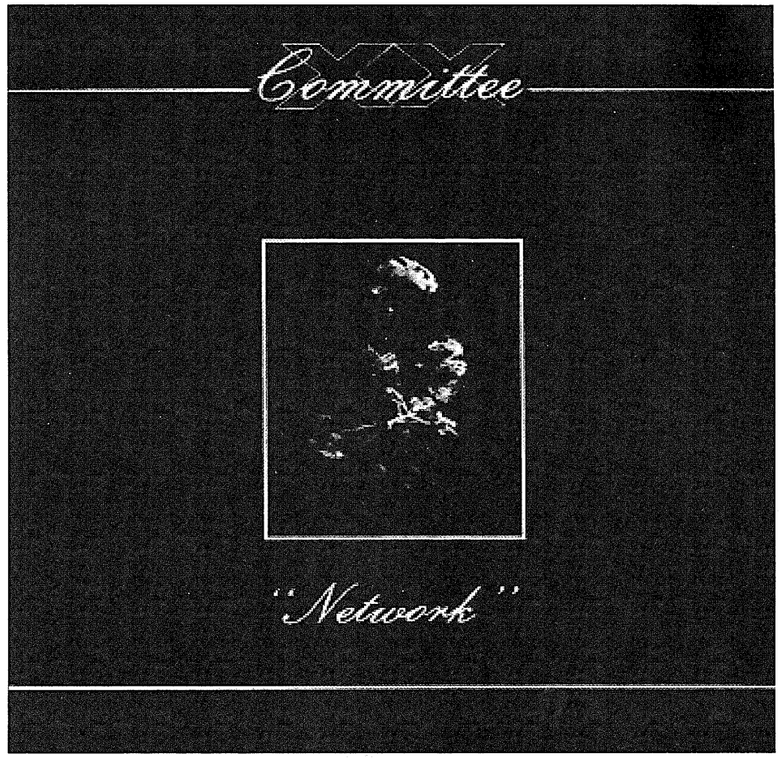
The Kittens left United Dairies after releasing another record with the label, the wonderful *Cake Beast* EP, amidst a ridiculous back-and-forth series of claims and counter-claims, with the band dismissing label founder John Fothergill as "a mock patron-of-the-arts" who made sexual advances on Dax and then withheld royalties and mail from them. Fothergill told Vox magazine about "more outrageous and untrue claims" being made by the band against him. They then told Sounds — one of the UK's weekly musicpapers — that they didn't wish to be associated with a label that condoned the actions of The Yorkshire Ripper, Peter Sutcliffe, a reference to the Whitehouse contributions to the *Hoisting* compilation (also on the UD imprint). Sounds allowed Fothergill a right-to-reply the following week. Even with all of the claims being made, Fothergill still maintained that, "...they also happen to be two of the most inspired people making music at the moment." The situation also brought about the end of the original United Dairies label, with Fothergill going on to set up his short-lived Experimental Records label for a run of three releases. Steve Stapleton carried on with the UD name, but did not release anything from outside of his immediate 'family' of artists ever again.

The Lemon Kiltens 'We Buy A Hammer For Daddy'



Even today, with all the benefits of hindsight and armed with a little more knowledge, the record still confuses and intrigues me. There is no real similarity to anything else released back then, other than, say, the more twisted moments of Metabolist or Fote (the latter featured one-time United Dairies label-mate Robert Haigh, and the former were big favorites of Karl Blake). And that's saying something when records such as the Swell Maps' *Jane From Occupied Europe*, Pere Ubu's *The Art Of Walking*, and The Noyes Brothers' double-LP set *Sheep From Goats* were released that very same month in 1980.

The album was reissued as a CD with slightly altered artwork on the band's own Biter of Thorpe label (BOT 131-03 CD) during 1993, but even that long-gone version now sells for silly money, and the record has been out-of-print ever since. A while back, Vinyl-On-Demand attempted to put together a box set, and I had even thought about bootlegging a couple of rough sounding live recordings, but neither idea got off the ground. Both artists went on to other things, but none approaching the 'uh?'-factor mélange of this first album.



XX Committee 'Network'

XX COMMITTEE
Network
BY CHRIS SIENKO

XX Committee came off an assembly line in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, rebuilt from parts left over from the recently dismantled art-punk group Y Front. Y Front's dissolution split the participants into two bands: Red Light, who were a post-punk outfit similar to the Fall, and XX Committee, who explored a more mechanical terra firma.

Their debut, a cassette titled *Steel Negro Music* (ARPH Tapes, recorded 1981, released 1982), sounds more or less of its time. It's full of pounding industrial rhythms and syncopations, distorted guitar squeals, ominous rumblings, and desolate atmospherics, hardly a stone's throw from classic Cabaret Voltaire tracks like 'Walls of Jericho.' Still, there is obviously something different here from your standard Industrial tape release of the time — no taped preacher voices, no slaughterhouse/gas-chamber imagery, no dancefloor beats, no cult of personality or media campaigns, just a hermetically sealed experiment working within the realms of industrial culture, rather than academia. Two years of constant experimentation and research later, XX Committee rose again as an unrecognizable entity.

One look at *Network*, an LP released by the San Francisco-based label Thermidor Records (1983), shows a group expanding their territories. Visually, it exudes art-gallery precision — gold lettering, abstract image on the cover, and 'cursive'-style dinner-invitation typography on a sumptuous red cover. Even more radical, though, are the sonics. *Network* is a fearless dive into the unknown, with a sound and approach that seems beyond the realm of predecessor or precedent.

The XX sound was built through untold hours of trial and error, as simple instruments are amplified and altered environmentally via unusual amp and mic placements. It's a music of elementary, forceful patterns — you can hear guitars hammered like dulcimers, repetitive synths, and a slow, metronomic drum machine, transformed into thunderous shudders by feeding it through an Earth cabinet. Despite Foust's protestations of a 'dead mix,' the sound on *Network* is detailed and hallucinatory, rich and imaginative, at a time where most industrial music was either wallowing in its own mud or strapping on dance boots for crossover success.

'Prayer Wells,' a track on side A, is little more than a repeated unison hammering sound from a guitar and the drum machine. The track oscillates between near-silence and pure attack, each hit flaring like a strobe-light in a dark room, leaving audio hallucinations, smeary 'trails' of sound that slowly decay and change each time. The simple thudding of 'Network of Noise' sounds like a distress signal transmitting from a sunken ship, wavering up through a vertical mile of seawater. 'National Re-Doubt,' the penultimate track on the album, is a pounding industrial nightmare worthy of early Test Department, but free of polemic or concessions to song-form — an endless headache, crafted carefully into repetitive splendor. *Network*, as heard 25 years later, seems not only ahead of its time, but nearly alone in its field. Joe Colley, the Hafler Trio, and very few others have even come close to creating sound constructions of such simple power and elegance.

The members of XX Committee have since gone their separate ways. Chris Scarpino is now in residence at MIT's engineering department. According to the school's web site, he's working in the field of humanoid robotics. Scott Foust continues to run the Swill Radio label, which recently celebrated 25 years of existence. He is best known for his involvement in groups Idea Fire Company and TART.

AS LOUD AS POSSIBLE: **Tell me a little bit about the process of creation. Were these created more as songs, or processes? What was involved in the exacting details of sound generation — I've heard stories of large Earth amps and unconventional mic placements. How much of each piece was 'played' and how much was a process left to mutate/expand on its own?**

SCOTT FOUST, XX COMMITTEE: **The music was definitely songs, or pieces or, as Chris and I sometimes liked to call them, events. For all of our Big Ideas, we didn't have a lot of equipment. Let's see...**

- A big Earth bass cabinet (Courtesy Mike Popovich of Y Front/ Story Of Failure/ Pickle Factory. It was big and upholstered like a couch.)

- Korg MS-10 (A synth I still use to this day.)

- Yamaha analog delay (I also use it to this day.)

- Dr. Rhythm 'programmable' rhythm box (It had the tinniest sound imaginable, but we compensated by running it through the Earth cabinet.)

- Teac 4-track cassette machine

- Other low budget guitars, amps, and microphones from the Y Front days.

Since we didn't have a lot to work with, we worked a lot with what we had. While we were running the pounding rhythms, we were either working on modifying the sound or listening to it, not recording. We'd work on finding a synth texture or something else to go with the rhythms, then do the actual recording; and then work on overdubs. There is a lot more playing on the record than you might think, although most of it is simplistic and repetitive. We used all four tracks all of the time, and only one ever had Dr. Rhythm and often there was some sort of manipulation to that when we recorded it. The playing was very rudimentary, but also very exacting. It was always a relief to get the part played correctly.

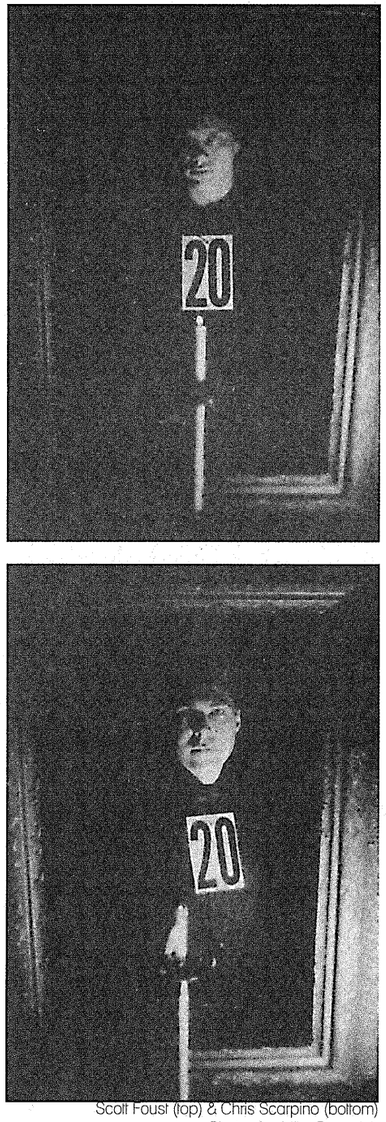
ALAP: How much of the final sound (as it is heard on the LP) is a result of recording manipulation, and how much was the sound as it was heard in the room? If I were to somehow find myself standing in your parents' basement at the time this album was being made, would I hear something that resembles the final results on the record (depending on where I stood in the room, of course), or did a lot of it come from the 4-track recording and resultant manipulation?

SF: You would definitely recognize the music if you were in the room. There is almost no post-production other than editing the beginnings and endings and overdubs. To this day, I hardly ever use post production other than some speed changes and a final EQ. I've always been more comfortable recording sounds when they sounded good to me as opposed to fixing them later.

ALAP: There's an enormous difference in sound (I think) from the debut cassette, *Steel Negro Music*, which is still tied to certain aspects of Industrial music to my ears, and the more rumbling, minimalist, downright alien *Network* LP. Was this a logical progression, or a swift break? Was the LP a progression/conclusion of the tentative steps taken on the tape, or was there, somewhere during this time, a big 'aha!' moment that changed everything?

SF: No, we pretty much abandoned a more conventional Industrial sound very early on. If you take 'NP Ward 3' off *Steel Negro Music*, you'll find it isn't all that far removed from *Network*. 'NP Ward 3' was actually a track composed by the short lived three piece version of Y Front with Rich Labrie joining Chris and me. The version Chris and I did wasn't nearly as good as the sadly unrecorded Y Front version. I think we both regretted including it on the tape by the time the tape was released because it sounded so 'old-fashioned' compared to the rest of the material. A lot of material from the tape re-appears on the LP, reworked and sometimes re-titled. (And in better fidelity.) Even before the tape was released, Chris and I decided we wanted to take Industrial Music to its logical conclusion and sound like industry. In our fevered revolutionary brains, Chris and I believed this Roussellian, but at the same time dystopian and yet beautiful, view of industry as a metaphor for Consumer-Capitalism acting as a very insidious form of totalitarianism, would put us on the New Music map. Sadly, this was not the case.

ALAP: Thermidor Records seems to me to be one of the most consistently interesting and unpredictable record labels of the 1980s, having put out records by the Birthday Party, the Minutemen, Flipper, Nig-Heist, yourselves, SPK, and Gerechtigkeits Liga. What attracted you to recording on Thermidor, and what attracted them to your project? How did the record sell upon its initial release? Do you have a sense of what kind of reviews the LP received?



Scott Foust (top) & Chris Scarpino (bottom)
Photos by Mike Popovich

SF: The saga of *Network* begins earlier than our association with Thermidor. After *Steel Negro Music* came out, Chris and I assembled a 30 minute demo tape with better fidelity and sent it along with copies of *Steel Negro Music* to record labels we thought might be sympathetic. Charles Ball, of Lust/Unlust Records in New York City, was the first to call. I think this was in the early Spring of 1983. He was very excited and so were we. Lust/Unlust was a legendary No Wave label, and we thought our negative energy was in a completely different, yet complimentary, direction. We had numerous phone conversations with Charles and The XX Committee LP was to come out after some other project. This was fine with us, as the LP was not yet completed to our satisfaction. One night we got a phone call. It was Charles Ball, calling from a phone booth. He had lost his job, his girlfriend had thrown him out, he was working at a Kentucky Fried Chicken and living at a YMCA to make ends meet. Chris and I were crushed, but by a strange stroke of luck, John Bouchard of Thermidor got in touch about two weeks after the Ball call. We were familiar with Thermidor via the SPK and Birthday Party releases, so Thermidor seemed like a perfect place for us. We hadn't actually sent him a demo, but we had sent one to Subterranean and they happened to share office space with Thermidor. John heard our tape and loved it. (These early successes were never to be repeated.) John was a great guy and very interesting to talk to. He worked very hard at making the record right and I think he was as disappointed as we were when it sank without a trace.

ALAP: Why did XX Committee contribute to one, and only one, compilation? What was it about the *Sex & Bestiality* comp that made you want to be a part of it?

SF: The truth is they were the only ones who ever asked. By that point, The XX Committee was on its last legs. We'd done a few tympani recordings with John Crookston, the Story Of Failure drummer [Story of Failure is another of Scott's bands at the time — they released one 7-inch on Swill Radio in 1983 - ed.], but we ended up using one I played. (We borrowed the tympani from a local college.) I really had to push Chris to work on this piece, as his interest was waning quickly. We went to a 'real' studio, run by Anschluss member Rick Vrable, to put the piece together and properly mix it. Bain Total had asked for the material to be on a reel-to-reel as well. It sounded gorgeous in the studio. We sent it off and never heard a peep again. I assumed it never came out. Many years later, in the late '90s, I saw the tape on a list somewhere for $30. I couldn't resist. I hadn't heard the piece in years, so I was very enthused to actually get a copy of the tape. After all that effort, the Bain Total crew only managed to replicate the piece in mono on one channel. Ho-Ho!

ALAP: The *Fighting Sensualist*'s booklet mentions that the LP suffers from 'a slightly dead mix' when the original 4-track tapes were converted to reel-to-reel in the studio. Given the chance to properly remix and re-master these recordings, would you still be interested in re-releasing this as an LP one day? I could imagine these recordings as a 2LP reissue, with *Network* on one platter, the better parts of *Steel Negro Music* tape and the 'Slaughterhouse' track on the other, all cleaned, brightened, and mastered to heavy vinyl, deep red gatefold cover, the works.

SF: I've had the same idea, believe me. I pictured it the exact same way — 2LP, red gatefold with the band photos from the *Fighting Sensualist* booklet large and in the middle. Maybe a booklet? I have the master tapes, but they are from our early Teac four-track cassette machine and it used a head alignment that is not compatible with other four-track cassette machines that I have tried. I know that if I could find a machine that could play the tapes and add a little EQ, it would sound perfect. I recently found a stereo cassette mix of the first side of *Steel Negro Music*. It sounds fantastic. I sent it to Graham Lambkin, who digitizes a lot of the IFCO material for me as well as other things, and he didn't recognize the music because the sound was so much better. The tape also included a full length version of one of the drone pieces. They all ran for 8-10 minutes, and we edited them down for the LP. I always hope I'll come across a stereo mix of the LP, but I suspect Chris discarded them all.

ALAP: If you were to re-release with a booklet (as you allude above), would it contain information like the kind we're discussing here, or would it be more art/manifesto-based? Do you feel it is important to contextualize the music in a verbal framework, given that you have the (hypothetical) opportunity to do so?

SF: Actually, this interview would be perfect. Since this music is from 25+ years ago, I think placing it in a historical context is important. I always believe the music should speak for itself, although I often try to add layers of meaning to help people understand the world the way I do through writings and artworks included with the records.

ALAP: Your parents are thanked on the back of the album jacket. In the booklet that accompanies the *Fighting Sensualist* retrospective cassette, you ask us to "pity them," as you and Chris endlessly reworked your loud, repetitive rhythm tracks in their basement. Did your parents have any other hand in the recordings, other than patience? Did they have anything to say about the final product?

SF: Actually, we weren't as loud as Y Front, which had live bass and drums, but it was loud enough. By that time, Chris and Mike Popovich had built a little enclosed studio in my parents' basement. It wasn't much, just some wood walls. This muffled the sound a bit, but we'd run and adjust the rhythm parts for hours sometimes. Chris really didn't operate intuitively at all. He was more of a trial and error tinkerer and extremely detail-oriented. Neither Chris nor I were into sheer volume, so we only played the music as loud as needed to get a good sound with lots of overtones.

As for my parents, I think they both liked arty / crazy types hanging around. Even though Johnstown, Pennsylvania is a very backward middle-American city, my parents' were a bit more worldly in that they would go to plays and shows in New York City fairly often. I don't think my mom was all that keen on The XX Committee music at the time, but she liked some of the music we listened to. Two of her favorite songs were 'Atmosphere' by Joy Division and 'Lights Out' by The Angry Samoans. She also liked a lot of Tangerine Dream / Klaus Schulze / Cluster / Kraftwerk, etc. My dad didn't care for any of that sort of music at all. When the LP came out in the summer of 1984, he was impressed, in that the record looked nice and came from San Francisco, which he viewed as a cultural center. He asked to hear it, and brought back to my room his signature 16 oz. bourbon and 7-Up with ice (3 oz. + of bourbon) and a pack of Bel Airs. He stood there listening through a side and a half silently chain-smoking. Halfway through side two, he finished his drink and announced, "Nobody is going to buy this! It's just the same god damn thing over and over!" How true.

ALAP: Please elaborate on the following phrase, contained in the *Fighting Sensualist* booklet: "The constant desire for more austerity was a huge burden on both of us." What aspects of this music were you trying to pare down? What prevented these desires from reaching fruition?

SF: I knew there was trouble when, soon after *Network* came out, Chris started saying that the squeaky feedback on 'Prayer Wells' was too much like a solo. Neither of us wanted to do another record with Dr. Rhythm, but we tried to do a lot of recording with the tympani and it just didn't have the alienating quality of the machine rhythms. Chris' main strength, besides his intelligence, was a fanatical obsession with detail and craft, and he turned his attention to designing a racing motorcycle transmission, for which a patent was awarded and a model built. He subsequently got degree in engineering when he was in his 30s. I suggested numerous times that we do an LP of foggy drones and he seemed interested, but nothing ever came of it.

ALAP: Tell me more about these 'tympani' recordings. Are we talking solo tympani, or would other instruments have been involved as well?

SF: It was solo tympani. The tympani was sitting in a music room at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown. Chris and I had graduated 4 years earlier, but we still had friends who were professors, so we arranged to use the tympani. There were two sessions. In the first, Chris and I tried playing the tympani, but neither of us could play accurately enough for the rhythms we wanted, so we tried again with John Crookston playing the tympani. John was a very good technical drummer, but playing a repetitive rhythm similar to the faster tracks on the LP for 10 minutes is difficult and the slight tempo variations in his playing made it hard for Chris and me to play along with the rhythm. The only finished recording to have tympani was 'Slaughterhouse' from the *Sex and Bestiality* comp. We used one of the test recordings of me playing a very slow beat for that piece.

ALAP: The booklet indicates that fellow XX-er Chris Scarpino 'increasingly became disillusioned with music' and is now an engineer at MIT. What do you think he felt music was lacking? Was the lack in the creation, the reception, the methodology?

SF: It was definitely the reception, or lack thereof, that soured Chris considerably. He had unreal expectations, to be sure, but the record pretty much sank without a trace. We received 100 copies as payment and sent just about every one of them to someone. Everyone from Eno to William Bennett. I made a lot of good contacts during this period, but there were few reviews (maybe one?) outside a few UK Power Electronics fanzines, and that scene was already in decline. We also had a faux interview (we wrote our own questions) in Unsound magazine. Byron Coley told me he wrote a review of it for something, but I've never seen it. Also, by mid '84, the entire underground structure that we were built for had pretty much disintegrated. By mid '84, underground music became much more interested in dance and kitsch. Our time had passed.

ALAP: Do you feel XX Committee had more to explore when they broke up, or was the project as finished as it needed to be?

SF: I think we could have made a strong LP of menacing drones and who knows where that would have led, but we were pretty much finished. Both of us believed, as I still do, that you don't just make the same record over and over again. Chris was frustrated by the lack of any sort of recognition and could see that there wasn't any sort of financial compensation or career to be had. I'm more of a Romantic, as well as very stubborn, but after working hard at music for 30-odd years, I have to admit he may have been correct. I still can't even break even on releases of my own music. In the end, I think we said everything we had to say.

ALAP: If Chris Scarpino were to come visit you today in Amherst and tell you he was interested in re-forming XX Committee, would you still want to do it? Do you feel you would have new things to say musically within this project's idiom? Would any technological advancements in recording equipment (perhaps you've since acquired a better set of microphones in the meantime, or a more sensitive recorder) play significant part in new recordings, or would the process of making XX Committee music be dependent on certain very specific pieces of equipment (the Earth amps, the specific microphones)?

SF: I think I'd have better odds of actually being able to make a living and get out of this shitty country, than of Chris wanting to do music again. If he did, I think we'd start by trying to integrate him as a guest in Idea Fire Company and see how it goes. Maybe something would tell me 'XX Committee' and I'd think about it. Maybe. I'm always suspicious of bands that reform after ten or twenty years. Never say never, I suppose. Although the Earth cabinet is long gone, my basic equipment is pretty much the same as it ever was. I think the main issue would be finding a direction that was interesting enough.

ALAP: Some of the ideas, patterns, and resonances of the more synth-based tracks on *Network* seem to be rough cuts of ideas that would become refined further on the *Anti-Natural* LP by the Idea Fire Company (another sadly underrated album that will no doubt get a feature like this in another 10-12 years time). Has XX Committee's past work significantly influenced IFCO's current forward momentum?

SF: After the two IFCO double LPs of collage/puzzle music (*Explosion In A Shingle Factory* and *The Fourth Dimension Is Money*), I felt we'd done all we could do in that direction and wanted to move towards a more monolithic sound. We also wanted to start playing live shows, so we stripped down our arsenal to two analog synths and a guitar. One of these synths was the Korg MS-10 and we worked mostly with repetitive patterns, so comparisons to The XX Committee are well warranted, although neither Karla nor I were thinking about The XX Committee. I think it was when we were working on the sequencing of *Anti-Natural* that Karla said, "This sort of sounds like The XX Committee." It hadn't occurred to me at all. I think *Network* is the best of my '80s work and that it has stood the test of time much better than a lot of records released at that time. I suspect the IFCO trilogy of *Anti-Natural*, *Stranded*, and *The Island Of Taste* will do the same.

ALAP: That might be it -- the short, varied, integrated track sequencing that causes me to hear similarities between *Anti-Natural* and *Network*.

In 2008, a CD reissue of *Network* was released on the Polish label Impulsy Stetoskopu. Does this version contain the 'brightened' mix promised in a hypothetical re-release, or will it essentially be a direct lift from the LP?

SF: The label is run by Rafal Kochan from Poland. He also wrote a book about Industrial music which is only available in Polish. The plan at this point is to do two CDs. The first will be a reissue of *Network*. It is taken from the LP, but Rafal did a nice job cleaning it up. The second will be called *Steel Negro Music* and will have the tracks from the tape that are non-LP in excellent sound taken from the master I mentioned earlier. It will also have a full version of one of the drone pieces and 'Slaughterhouse,' which Graham Lambkin did some work to fix up. It was released in an edition of 250 copies, and is available from all the usual suspects as well as from me.

RJF

Greater Success in Apprehension & Convictions

BY KRISTIAN OLSSON AND TOMMY CARLSSON

25 years have now passed since RJF recorded *Greater Success in Apprehension & Convictions*. The few who are still around to actually remember them try not to. Or they respond with a mixed feeling of fear and disgust. Their legacy has been surrounded by an impenetrable obscurity. It goes without saying that they were playing in a different league than the other Industrial acts operating in Sweden at that time. No other unit had the guts and willpower to take it all the way like RJF did. Forgotten pioneers of the Power Electronics movement. Blood Ov Thee Christ appeared shortly after, but was too wasted from sniffing gasoline and glue to cause any permanent damage at this point.

Let's go back in time to where it all began. In the end of the '70s, Leif Thuresson got fed up with the punk movement and started to record pre-Industrial music together with a friend under the name Garden Dwarves. Experimental sickness with bass, tape manipulations and saxophone mayhem. Garden Dwarves made two compilation appearances, one being the second volume of *Snatch Tapes*. Leif also did a contribution for the first Sterile Records release — *Standard Response*. From here, he obviously drifted into much darker and unexplored territories.

In 1982, Thuresson joined forces with Tryggve Persson and they formed Kommando RJF. They chose the name RJF in the tradition of SPK. First "intended to stand for anything anyone wanted it to stand for," but later, in 1983, the use of the name Rein Judische Fett became far more common. One day the two blond libertines occupied the rehearsal place of the band Blå Sol. Armed with analogue synths, a tape violin (a home-made device by Tryggve) and a stolen rhythm machine, they produced what was to be known as the first Power Electronics album from Sweden. They released it on their own label — New Terror Now — in an edition of 300 copies. It did strike down in the Swedish scene like a nailbomb! It didn't take them long to become the most hated band in Sweden. However, they were outsiders by choice. The cover artwork for the LP includes a photo of a decapitated man, mutilated beyond recognition. A rare choice of visuals for that time...Even if the international Industrial/Power Electronics scene was an obvious influence on RJF, they forged their own unique brand of anti-music. Often compared with bands like Whitehouse and Ramleh, they never considered themselves to be followers of the UK scene. Conceptually, they were light-years away from any of the Swedish groups active then.

While others never dared to go all the way, always trying to justify everything with a stupid smile, RJF were the exact opposite — hostile, drugged-out misanthropes. Numerous death threats and smear campaigns were received back in the days, but that was exactly the kind of feelings they intended to provoke in people. Thuresson lifted much inspiration to his lyrics from the works of Artaud, Celiné, Cioran and Nietzsche. Musical inspiration didn't only come from the Industrial scene, but also from Suicide, the Velvet Underground, and early Stooges. Extremely nihilistic in their approach, RJF exercised pure destructive force — just for the hell of it. Behind the wall of depraved electronics and dysfunctional spasmolytic rhythms, RJF reveals a knife-sharp reflection of a diseased world choking to death in its own vomits. Not with the purpose to break the shield that separates humanity from reality, but with the aim to hammer the last nails in the coffin of mankind...In their own words, "This is not about music, this is survival and fighting back! A cock down the throat of morality, a knife in the back of society. RJF create their own values, control and knowledge."

***Greater Success in Apprehension & Conviction* was distributed by another actor in the Swedish post-mortem scene, the madman Ulf Bågenhammar of Pop 'N' Roll Family. Fueled on amphetamine and alcohol, Bågenhammar did handwritten catalogues where he offered all kinds of extreme anti-music from around the world. Without him, there wouldn't be any signs left of RJF in the scene today, except maybe some scars and fractures on their enemies. Nevertheless, Thuresson helped out with the PNRF activities and thus RJF reached out to and established many contacts in the underground. I've taken parts of very enthusiastic correspondence between Thuresson and people like Maurizio Bianchi, Nigel Ayers, GX Jupitter-Larsen, Masami Akita, and Pietro Mazzochin (Swastika Kommando). All praised the work of RJF.**

RJF. Sweden. 1983

Recordings took place for a second full-length album, *Roped in Rubber*. They worked with a local producer that was threatened to stop working with them because of their reputation as a Nazi-band. We can all figure out the reactions it caused in the early '80s, when choosing such a name for an Industrial group and dealing with controversial subject matters. Here the demise of RJF began. The master tape for *Roped in Rubber* disappeared under mysterious conditions, and only a handful of copies are drifting around in Sweden, most likely overdubbed, thrown away, or disintegrated to dust. According to a report in the German magazine "FWEWGEGEWGWEGE?", here the recordings are much harsher and uncompromising than before. Some of the track titles include 'I Need a Fix,' 'Bring Back Slavery,' and 'Fight or Fuck.' Unfortunately, I doubt anyone will ever hear this again. After performing live in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and London, the group dissolved in 1984. Tryggve left the Power Electronics scene behind him and adapted to a normal Svensson-life. Leif, on the other hand, did the only right thing and lapsed into slow death through excessive consumption of hard drugs and alcohol. He is one of the few who has remained loyal to the post-mortem lifestyle, and remains so until death liberates. There is no going back once you have crossed the abyss. Leif has survived. Even if he has been going in and out of the rubber room, a plan has been made for a final statement from Kommando RJF. Years of planning has resulted in *Sweet Slow Suicide*. He first attempted to realize this project in 1991, but the lack of proper equipment and motivation made this an impossibility. One can only speculate on all the depravity, hatred and frustration that has been growing inside his tormented brain for the last 25 years? Sick and tired, funeral is approaching fast. *Sweet Slow Suicide* will include both recently written material and new versions of the tracks on *Roped in Rubber*. Time will tell when this is to happen...In the meanwhile, surrender to desire, despair, disgust, destruction and death — the sound of RJF.

"Yes, it's an orgasmic music, a 5 knuckle shuffle parade. I live in a bad land, you know, where political shits & Catholic pre-judgments are united to put down new sizes of modern arts (including music) calling them outlaws & mad things for bad guys — against this arcane judgments & the people behind, I spent a life outside normality where freedom was enchantment of damaged brains. I paid with my pockets this anti-conformist living but now I'm very happy of what I am doing & glad to be."

Maurizio Bianchi, Milano, July, 1980

"I appreciated your LP, but sometimes is too similar to Whitehouse & co. — please forget all that people and embrace the new plain truth of MB! You don't need repulsive things, just trust in your efforts — more confidence in your means, man! Everything will be fine and better with you and all of your friends and enemies too! We can be the future, but we must be aware of our own functions in this life!"

Maurizio Bianchi, Milano, 6 June, 1983

"I like violence, sex passions, and woman horror! I hate all the people that would the human submission and discipline (I am rejected for the military service for cerebral disorder!) — I love the sadomaso sex, and for this I am very interested for your project and record!"

Pietro Mazzochin, Bassano del Grappa, 19 December, 1983

"I too am sick and tired of this world, all the ignorant fools. This world will fall into its destruction, and this is good, because the ruins of the old will be architecture of the new! To destroy something can be the breaking up of entities into more dynamic pieces to be collaged together into new forms."

G.X. Jupitter-Larsen

K. O.

* * *

When pondering how ridiculously rare this album is nowadays (300 copies pressed), it sure feels funny having seen it pop up a LOT of times in the used record bins of Gothenburg. Just a few weeks ago, an old acquaintance mentioned having recently found a copy for 1 Euro in a bargain bin. Good for him. And well, it's not really surprising that this LP never really struck a chord with most Gothenburgers. The city of Gothenburg, while being a beautiful and friendly town, was plagued in the '70s and '80s by a particularly nasty breed of people known as 'proggers.' This herd consisted of very vocal followers of various 'progressive' political movements — often with a soft spot for strong leaders; Mao, Stalin et al. The proggers favoured a lifestyle of smoking pot, drinking herbal tea, talking endlessly, and listening to bearded people strumming guitars. (All similarities to the current US noise scene are purely coincidental.) Proggers also fiercely HATED the punk movement. Bold as they were, the punks never really managed to kill off the proggers as they should have. They co-existed side by side, often in a stomach-turning spirit of congeniality. Oh yes, the legions of 'progressive' leftists had the town in a tight grip, and wouldn't let go.

And if you thought punks were bad, what happens when a band like RJF comes along?

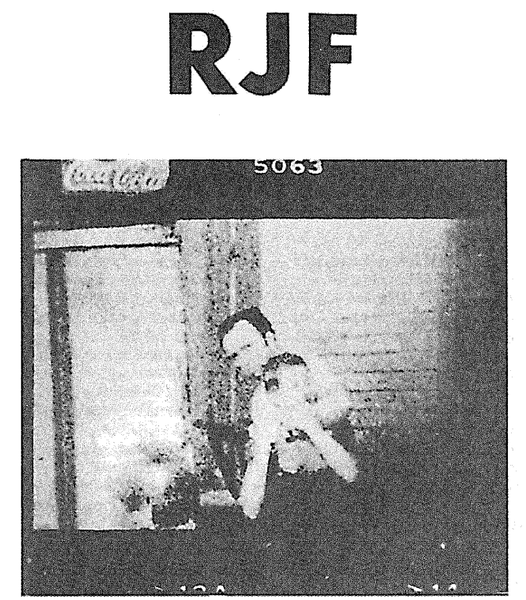
The band took their cues from the 1st generation of Industrial artists like TG and especially SPK, and their use of provocative imagery, coupled with an honestly anti-social attitude, could probably be said to be in a typically industrial vein. This is not to say that they come off as copycats in any way, but merely to say that this is an album that belongs to a certain tradition.

Aided by the main distributor of Noise/Industrial/Power Electronics music in Sweden at that time, Pop 'N' Roll Family, RJF released this LP on their own label. The album was spread around the globe, and most copies were sold to Japan and the USA. The atmosphere on the LP is one that reeks of despair and angst. The sounds are chilling and stripped-down, at times minimalistic, ranging from the abrasive screech of the opening track 'Maximum Pain,' to the strangely catchy rhythms of 'Jugend Dance,' to the drag-me-out-in-the-gutter-and-kill-me padded cell aesthetics of 'Zuwiederhandlungen' [sic]. The album was recorded in a local rock band's rehearsal space, using pretty basic equipment, including synths and a primitive drum machine. The track 'Christmas Laughing' makes use of Laurie Anderson's old invention, the magnetic tape violin, making for a dizzying flurry of sounds directly from the brain of a psychopath's Christmas Eve. It's no big secret that the band members were indeed influenced by the aforementioned Industrial pioneers, but you can also sense a huge influence (in attitude rather than sound) from the nihilistic energy of bands like early Velvet Underground, Suicide, and the Stooges. Housed in a stark black & white sleeve with a mysterious front cover design (why the Coca-Cola logo? Who are the people on the photo?), and a striking display of graphic brutality on the back cover, the LP really struck like a bomb. Sweden had now given birth to its first proper Industrial/Power Electronics album, and while it has lingered in relative obscurity the last 20 years, it is pleasing to see that the LP is now gaining more recognition. Having been one of the people involved in the reissuing of the LP on CD format, I will simply express my pleasure knowing this (for some) legendary recording is now more widely available.

There you have it. RJF produced one album, seven tracks — no other recordings exist. The recordings made for the follow-up tape (working title *Roped in Rubber*) were made on a multi-track master tape, but were never mixed/mastered, and the tape now seems to be lost forever. At least this is what I was told when I talked to one of the band members in the late '80s, but you are advised to take that with a pinch of salt. Maybe the tape will somehow magically surface one day. I sure hope so, but I'm not holding my breath.

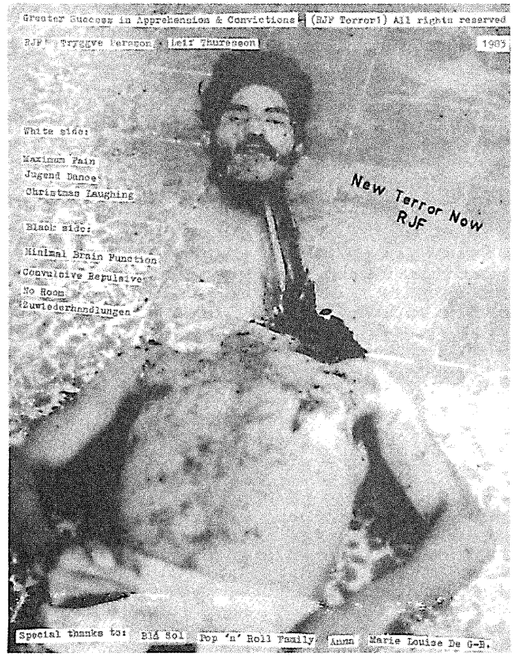
T. C.

Greater Success In Apprehension and Convictions was reissued as a CD by Segerhuva in 2008.



Greater Success in Apprehension & Convictions

RJF



REVIEWS

BY CHRIS SIENKO (EXCEPT NOTED*)

AHLZAGAILZEHGUH
'Misinterpreted Injury' 2 x 7-inch
Razors & Medicine / 010

This double platter, based on the artist's troubles with kidney surgery in youth, is sonically noteworthy — while mid-range and grainy to a fault, the sound is also dense, revealing tons of nuance and depth. Ahlzagailzehguh's commitment to the nasty frequencies of the audio spectrum is commendable, and works well on these short blasts (45 RPM). All four sides are dirty, raw-nerve thunder, like stripping the insulation off a speaker wire and, instead of finding copper inside, finding throbbing, unprotected veins. The rapid-fire sound this project is best known for here is slowed down a bit and rendered more billowy — it makes me think of the change between Pain Jerk circa *Cacophany of A Thousand Pleasures* and the thicker, heavier, less frantic sound of a tape like *Greater Curvature*. The moves are still in there, and the style is obvious, but the processes are developed, slowed, and allowed to coagulate into nasty clots of audio hairball, an obvious successor to Sickness and his 'Scumbag Electronics.'

Side One feels like a warm-up considering what's coming, but on its own, it's still plenty ferocious, with a grinding, billowing center frequently interrupted by low-end roars, deep and opaque.

By contrast, Side Two tweezes all the pain receptors of the brain with dentist drill high-ends, the occasional low blats acting almost as relief despite being twice as loud. It builds with a blind fury and a savant-like ability to rein in a series of frenzied attacks that seem to be in a perpetual state of falling apart. Seriously, it sounds like the walls are collapsing on the equipment, and it's only through exceptional reflexes and a bit of blind luck that everything falls into place. The truth, of course, is that it isn't luck, and the real pros can simulate and then dominate this kind of seemingly uncontrollable mayhem with ease, without making it look too easy.

Side Three is not as distinct, with more thick, crunching, roaring steel tunnels of might — weightiness, grotesqueries. Side Four chucks a load of nearly-buried voices and gagging sounds into our lap, still trebly and nasty in tone, expansive but monochrome. This final side rides out into a shearing finale that sounds like a wind turbine, blowing pollution into your window all night. Your kidneys won't be the only thing that's sore come morning.

ANGEL OF DECAY
Covered In Scars CD
Desolation House / DH-0700

Covered In Scars marks the first full-length recording of Angel Of Decay and Jonathan Canady's real follow-up to Deathpile's incredible but final bout of intense Power Electronics, the *G.R.* CD.

I won't hide the fact that I had bigger hopes for this CD than it's realised, but after concentrated vehemence as *G.R.*'s 'Addicted,' I suspect the opportunity to publicly forego such venom in favour of less abrasive atmospheres was a welcome one.

Essential reading is the CD insert, a series of nightmare journals scribbled upon waking and now used as the basis for the eight pieces for this disc. The dreams are remembered vividly and graphically, with distorted perspectives of rape, torture, and murder vigorously stirred by the subconscious at work before being heavily dosed over the shadowy, layered analog synth passages which haunt *Covered In Scars*.

While the repetitive nature of the synthesizer work, most of it neck-deep in reverb and delay, stretches the CD a little far, it's ultimately not overly distracting from the confronting atmospherics which it maintains, which are far more evocative than any of the supposed finery the likes of Cold Meat or Cold Spring will tout as 'the darkest of the dark.'

Without the Euro cloak-and-dagger aesthetic, Angel of Decay may never reach what should be its target audience, but those willing to investigate *Covered In Scars* will encounter some genuinely horrific ambient work. (Chris Groves)

ASTRO & JAZKAMER & HAIR STYLISTICS
Motorcycle Fuck With The Ghost Rider CD
aRCHIVE / archive37

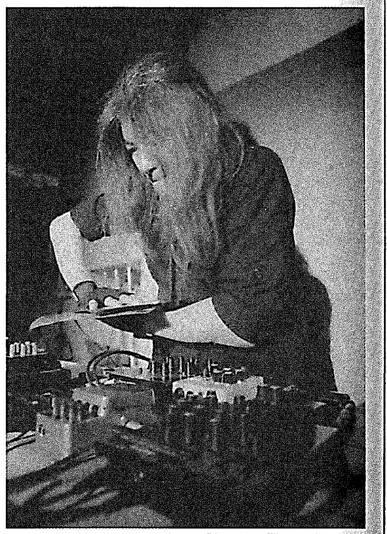
There's nothing deft or intricate about *Motorcycle Fuck With The Ghost Rider*, just a blazing noise blissout as the five performers (Astro is represented here as a duo of Hiroshi Hasegawa and Reiko A) frantically pulverize their instruments in a chaotic big-band noise grind heavy on richly-saturated distortion.

The dual synths at work, together with chunks of guitar and the occasional vocal, wrestle for some primacy as the bloated elements eagerly collide, small elements sharpening in focus or gaining momentum throughout while a thick layer of indecipherable electronics, drums and assorted residue cushions the plummet, as each ascent falters and falls to allow the next to rise in its place.

The barraging fervour is akin to Hijokaidan in its intent, even if the mix and instrumentation isn't so comparable (largely thanks to the synths), focusing on primal — almost crazed — energy to continue the sonic grappling for three quarters of an hour. It's particularly inspiring to see Hasegawa and Masaya Nakahara opt for this line of punishing harshness after exploring other avenues in their more familiar line of work this decade. Those expecting pretty, intelligent or comprehensible noise-making will find nothing in *Motorcycle Fuck With The Ghost Rider*; those who realize the right artists and chemistry need none of that have found their proof. (Chris Groves)

BIZARRE UPROAR
Liha-Evankeliumi 3 x CD
Freak Animal/Institute Of Paraphilia Studies / FA-CD-045/none

Pasi Markkulla's Bizarre Uproar project has been releasing sonic depravity for over 15 years, but this has to stand as a monument of total filth in his oeuvre. It's a staggering document of coprophiliac junk-metal harsh noise abuse. The title translates as 'Gospel of the Flesh,' and I assume it is in some manner inspired by the text 'Lihan Evankeliumi: Moraalin Arvostelua' ('The Gospel of Flesh: A Critique of Morality') by Finnish-American anti-religious agitator and writer Moses Hahl. I haven't been able to track down a full copy of the book, so I can't offer any solid insight, but it could be a



Astro. Photo by Thierry Masson

path to follow for those looking to dissect Bizarre Uproar further. One quote from the piece suggests a seminal concept: "Insofar as permitted by body structure, man has no natural limits on his ability to develop, only social ones of a material and moral nature." The torturous endurance and humiliation of this release could be seen as a rejection of the limiting standards of society, and an indulgence in the empowering possibilities of an unimpeded exploration of obsessions, specifically those that celebrate bodily passions.

I never acquired any of the ten original *Liha-Evankeliumi* 3-inch CDr volumes that are collected here, and am thankful that Mikko Aspa, the master of Freak Animal, knows that some things are too good to languish in limited edition obscurity. When approaching this, one has to realize that it's not like the Incapacitants' *Pariah Tapes* 5 x CD box set, which was a collection of material spanning years. *Liha-Evankeliumi* is an unapologetic permutation-focused set of works derived from one year of recordings. It's not even everything he did in 2006, just the complete document of this specific concept. It's basically the same few sound elements masterfully manipulated in different patterns, intensities, volumes, and durations.

Upon immersion, you're immediately caked by static washes, wretched screams, and total junk metal savagery. It's impressive how Markkulla moves each element in the sound field, using contrast and differences in duration. Environmental confines are clearly set by loops of clanging metallic garbage and reverberations with streams of hissing feedback and static trails running in and out of the scene. The third track of Disc One introduces the more 'Power Electronics' elements he employs intermittently across the set: severe close-range feedback, crashing rhythmic metallic junk, and simultaneously commanding yet desperately frenzied and repetitive vocals. The voice chants out mantras of need and obsession, unable to think about anything else, willingly buried in the digestive refuse of man and machine. Bass textures are strong and rumbling across tracks. Feedback placement is piercing and gritty at times. Metal junk explodes across and inside the midrange. He really has mastered the ultra hissy white noise steam blast texture, one that always sounds great when combined with lashes of feedback and churning low end rumbling.

The grinding and banging metallic textures are a big focus of the work — similar textures can be found in prime junk metal era K2. The glaring difference between the Bizarre Uproar treatment and that of K2 is that this material is not cut up at all. This is all attack-based, with looping being the only type of explicit manipulation. I'm assuming elements are multi-tracked, but the organic violence tearing through the metallic roar is a very live experience.

While the entire sound palette is insanely loud and harsh, there are levels of contrast between pieces. Some sections are paced at a violently brutal frenzy for the duration, and others are more focused on a single texture as it interacts with subtle changes, as with Disc One, track nine, the first primarily hypnotic junk abuse loop based piece, which acts as a respite amidst the chaos. On Disc Three starting with track three, a sloppy and wet recording of something bodily is repeated once per track across 11 consecutive tracks. After those, a piece similar to the rest material of the set comes in, more metal junk abuse, scraping and shoving, and what sounds like chains, though it's actually one of the more restrained pieces and runs its course without diverting into anything other than what it starts as. A contemplative piece, bringing to mind images of the body spent, lying among pooled filth in a tiled cell.

After the primary *Liha-Evankeliumi* material ends, Disc Three is filled out with two bonus tracks. The first, 'Eläimellinen Purkaus,' which means both 'Bestial Burst' and 'Bestial Ejaculation' is a powerful 16 and a half minute piece of the now familiar textures from the album, but delivered in a more patient manner, there's an open pacing to the proceedings, with vocals delivered as sneering bursts instead of looping mantras. The textures are also at times treated to a weird stuttering effect, which creates images of paused VHS footage, trying to glimpse some detail in grainy darkness.

The last track is a reissue of the edition of 30 biz-card CDr release *Rautaputki* in its entirety, the title translates as 'Iron Pipe.' I imagine it's a composition on the object as tool of discipline and punishment. It's the most 'song'-like composition of the set, opening with some whispered vocals, which are burst shot and eventually tweaked with reverb. Near the end he starts yelling, there is a sense of distance that stands in contrast to the up close assault of all the *Liha-Evankeliumi* material. This seems more flat sonically than the other material. I should be clear that this is not a negative critique, and it actually empowers the track with a lo-fi seediness that enhances the whispers from a sewer atmosphere.

The whole thing is delivered in an impressive, rigid imitation leather fold-over box, with a nice elastic strap that wraps over to hold it shut. While the artwork makes complete sense in that this is a presentation of a blasphemous gospel and should therefore be colorful and intricate as an unholy text, I don't really like the layered images on the front cover. They are executed very well, but I have an ingrained aversion to layered pictures and semi transparent layers. I also find the use of tinted images in the booklet garish. I think the most effective images presented are the straight forward humiliation documents. I would have liked more stark black and white layout with lurid and realistically color images, just looking at cover art for other BU releases, it is obvious he has the b/w filth xerox aesthetic down, so the color work is definitely intentional; perhaps the visuals are intended as an assault in every way. Therefore, color must also be employed to carry on the aesthetic of the original releases. A minor complaint, based on my inclinations, and in no way a critique which should suggest a shortcoming of the presentation.

There is nothing that keeps this archival masterpiece from being an absolute necessity if you have even the slightest interest in depraved filth noise. Even as he wallows in both audio and physical decay, it's an ecstatic fury found only through indulging in life's sensations that is on display. Again looking back to K2, that was a sound always giving the impression of a massive factory exploding, and even when there was a vocal presence, a sense of humanity wasn't really present. Everything about this is human. From the human face and digested matter to the anti-Christian imagery, it's about the human reaction to life. The sound of the screaming voice is man, the listener's reaction to the feedback is a physical interaction, and in the staggering masses of junk metal manipulation one can only imagine the physical exertions to generate all that noise. It's not just 'thrash some metal, take a break, edit it all together,' it's waves of dripping maniacal thrashing of chains and sheet metal, rust, spit, blood, shit, sweat, then into the shower to get sprayed down and scream. This is truly punishing listening. (Nick Henry)

BLACK LEATHER JESUS
Skuff CD
Turgid Animal / TA371

A new release from this long-running collective of Houston noise-devils, masterminded primarily by Richard Ramirez, and this time based around the theme of revenge, or so sayeth the catalog copy. While I've never been a total devotee of this project, every album I've heard by them has always had a track or two that got the job done, scratched the itch in an agreeable way, and at least one to three tracks that really stood out, enough to make me look up at the speakers and marvel a little. I've never heard an album by them that was end-to-end amazing, but neither have I heard one that didn't have at least a few amazing tracks, and this album is no exception.

The opener, 'Take Revenge,' is good, solid, itch-scratching noise pummel the way it's done in Texas, but it doesn't prepare you for the beatings to come. 'Primer' is a cathedral of huge, booming room-tone with metal clanging and metallic wind-tunnel sonorities. A mournful pair of chords drone on in the background like a Black Metal intro, while the ritual metal abuse continues in the foreground.

At this point, things get even stronger. 'Slave Auction' starts on a frightening tone, a piece of third-ear puncturing worthy of Maryanne Amacher. The track is crumbling, fizzling ache, played with a suffocating density by the five-man version of BLJ, reminding me that, at their best, this project can stand tall next to even a legendary project like Skin Crime. 'Bathory Murders' drops the frequencies even lower, a crackling electrical field of Wall-like crumbles, with metallic clanking seeping in, a great, grinding undertow of heavy Industrial abuse.

The remaining tracks, 'Hidden Plague' and the two-minute closer 'Smear Campaign,' just sound good. They don't have a distinct angle to them like the previous three tracks, they merely get the job done, once again.

Everything on *Skuff* is good, and a good half of it is great. I know there are probably pitch-perfect BLJ records out there; whether I'll get to ever hear them is debatable, but as large-group noise excursions go, this has enough toys and trinkets throughout to make it worthwhile for the casually curious. Fanatics already know what's up.

BLOD
Red Light Companion 3 x LP box set
Segerhuva / SEGER 22

Segerhuva's approach to promoting legendary Swiss underground noise project Blod has been one of escalating sincerity, the 'if you can't hear us, we'll shout a little louder' school of noble persistence. Blod is one of those projects that sharply divides harsh-heads. To those who enjoy technique, progression, and endless contrast games, Blod seems impossibly mundane, maybe even...gasp!...untalented. Fanatics, however, appreciate Jesper Forselius' ten-year endeavor to be one of the ultimate noise fetishists in a country where noise fetishism seems like some sort of birth-right. As each new release arrives to mixed press and slowly trickles out of the warehouse over the course of years (think about that...how many other noise releases can you think of that take multiple YEARS to sell?), Segerhuva's response is not to let it go, but to go bigger. Didn't care for the 'Romantic and Deranged' 7-inch (1999)? Well, how about a full-length CD? (The strawberry-scented *My Beloved Daughters*, from 2004.) Still not interested? Well, how about a three-LP boxed set? The only way for Segerhuva to escalate from here would be to rent out a geodesic dome environment in which participants would be inundated by Blod noise for 24 hours a day. Not a bad idea, actually...

Like Denshi Zatsuon's *Early Three Works* 3 x CDr set from a few years back, Red Light Companion reissues two out of print early cassette works, as well as Blod's half of the split CDr with Goat (Xerxes, 2003) and all four of the project's compilation appearances (a fifth, the track from Segerhuva's *Sweetness Will Overcome* CD, has been omitted, probably for obvious reasons). The box contains three beautifully thick, clean, resonant LPs in black sleeves, a disturbing photograph of a young woman kneeling in a white room, hair over her face, clutching a teddy bear, a pool of blood splattered in front of her (menstruation fears, or something far worse?), and a pink envelope with 'xxx' typed on the front (actually typed, as in on a typewriter) and sealed with a red heart sticker on the back. If you're willing to tear into your precious fetish object to see what's inside, you'll find a letter of liner notes, penned by Keith Brewer of Mania (and formerly Taint). Brewer's stream-of-conscious letter zig-zags between Peter Sotos-style whore narratives ("How much is it worth?") before taking a turn for the provisionally romantic by the end, referring to the object of his affection as "my lover," ending with the seeming realization that the fantasy is always filthier than the reality ("It is all...a lie." [ellipses his]).

LP 1 (*Nortorious*) is one of the project's earliest releases. Promising 'Roland and Boss Electronics' on the original tape cover (also the source of the box set's cover art), Blod gets into gear right away with one hard, monolithic blast after another, each with skin-tingling titles like 'Jordan's Bondage Lesson,' 'Vehement Nymphomaniac,' and 'Lemonade from her Cunt.' Each track is a brooding 'blast track,' and is the equivalent of staring 27 different holes in the floor with your eyes — singly focused, concentrated intensity. (Side Two is especially blast-heavy, with sixteen individual tracks on it.)

Primordial, the second LP, does progress from *Notorious*. It's a much chunkier, rock-hewn texture, with a bit of air added and a bit less abrasion in the mix. Both albums are interesting in that each track has a genuine cut-off point; we hear the machines being shut off, the reverb outlasting the noise by a half-second, rather than the usual edit coming from a pause button or a swipe of the editor's razor. It's a small thing, but it compartmentalizes each little blast, makes it feel more like its own considered piece, rather than a random snippet from an afternoon with the equipment left on.

The third LP (*Vildhavre*) starts with the material from the split with Goat, and there is definitely a variant in style here. It's more churning, and less blast-heavy, more dynamic, with traditional harsh noise sounds happening behind the heavy processing (it sounds like slowed-down samples, perhaps of other noise recordings). Several tracks stand out: 'Southern Comfort' sounds like electric jolts coiling around a cracking bullwhip; 'Satan is Real' contains extremely raw tones, full of voices, electrical impulses, breaking, and fury. (Unfortunately, the amazingly-named '20 Bucks If I May Look At You While You Shit On A Public Toilet' is a bit one-dimensional, sonically.)

The comp tracks are the cherry on top. 'Fountain of Youth' (from the *Piller Thriller* comp) is more dramatic than the tape materials and very shrill in the manner of horror movie soundtracks come to life. 'Himmelblan' and 'Extremely Shitexplosive Sara' (from the *Esthetics of Cruelty* 2 x CD) are varied enough to show genuine contrast. 'Himmelblan' is dirty, atomized, rough, tape-damaged, and slightly restrained, but coursing with atmosphere. 'Sara' starts with a tape of a girl (Forselius' girlfriend?) giggling and singing into a mic, followed by more mid-range density, expanding into weird, *Conet Project*-like scales and obscure cryptographs chattering into uncomprehending air. 'Sister' (from the *Pornography Hurts* CDr comp) is more Power Electronic in nature, high wheedling lines skittering over a throbbing industrial base. It almost sounds like there may even be a tape of Whitehouse in there somewhere. A great ending.

The Blod sound (and this entire box set) is a paean to moments spent in the throes of desire and aching wants. White knuckles, tight jeans, no amount of jerkin' it makes it better, and frankly, you're not looking for release/relief anyway, just another blinding flash of light. Pure, homegenic, orthodox texture for those who don't ever experience the feeling of 'enough.' Forselius captured his every strained desire on tape. Mine is records — I can't even enjoy the records I have sometimes without thinking of what the next ones will sound like. Listening to Blod not only immerses you in the sound, but also immerses you in want. In the presence of such pressure and volume, you get that hysteria that you can also get from porn, drinking, sex, gambling, risk-taking...just the feeling of wanting more. Just, more. Never enough. If I could put some more noise on top of this noise, if I could set up 100 stereos and aim every speaker at my head, now would be the time. Blod is a celebration of the kind of need and want that rises even when your needs and wants are being satiated.

THE BRAN (...) POS
Coin-Op Khepri CD
Crippled Intellect Productions / CIPCD021

The Bran (...) Pos doesn't have much trouble balancing sweet and salty. One minute, he's bouncing on his heels and singing about bunnies in a child-like falsetto, the next he's donning an executioner's hood and running the entire staff of the MIT Electronic Music department through a chipper shredder. Victim and killer, all in one person. Sonically, previous recordings have tended toward improvisational, almost process-driven cycles of arpeggiating analogue electronics, which were interesting and sometimes physically affecting, but seemed somewhat lacking in overall shape or structure. Moment to moment was fine, but by the end, it's hard to remember much beyond that old familiar feeling of overstimulation.

This new record not only has a structure (it's a concept album about casino gambling in Egypt), it even has songs. The opening track drops us head-first into a dark, evocative synth journey — I imagine a scene where a moneyed gambler rides a slow boat through the dead of night, arriving at a pyramid which opens its doors invitingly. Immediately after that, the scene turns colorful and cheery, mechanized and not just a bit obsequious. "It's been some time since your last visit!" coos a mechanized voice upon arrival, reminding the visitor that, "if ever you experience trouble, don't panic!" The soundtrack is overrun with avant-cocktail lounge music with little burbling melodies, cha-ching sounds, giddy tweets and trembles, all of them recognizable by anyone who has ever visited a casino, be it in Egypt or Japan or the US. A carnival of money-losing awaits you!

The tracks in the middle of the disc carry us through the casino experience, and remind me quite a bit of second-wave Ralph Records, circa 1981-84, like half-remembered tracks heard on various 'Buy or Die!' 7-inch comps. Think early Yello, Renaldo & The Loaf, lighter moments of Tuxedomoon, Nash the Slash, Freshly Wrapped Candies, and Balloon Farm, all filled up with nasty helium voices and insistent synth-punk chord stabbings. Like the SF scene of the past 10 years, there's a lot of day-glo and sugar, but also like the SF scene 20 years ago, there's also a dark undercurrent that reminds me of watching a person who is tripping and seemingly happy, but who keeps tossing verbal warning shots across the bow, always appearing to be on the edge of snapping and really hurting someone. The Khepri Casino is there for the customer's enjoyment, but beneath all the burbling melodies and happy sounds and the jingle-jangle of those shiny golden coins crashing into dispensing trays, the security guards always glare at you from the corners, and when the money's gone, it's all over.

Eventually, either through bankruptcy or forcible expulsion, the monied gambler is forced to move on, and the 14-minute penultimate track 'Nephthy's Nightboat' again sounds like a moonless journey on a pitch-dark river. It's cold, frighteningly open and huge, and completely puts you into a very specific location with only synth sounds and tapes, that feeling of nature breathing all around you. One more jolly song of payout closes the disc, indicating that the protagonist was just traveling to the next location, and that the games will go on through the night and probably into the dawn, or at least until the money runs out.

Though not strictly noise, there are a lot of elements of the Bran (...) Pos's style as heard on previous albums. The cycling electronic bubbles and baubles of more abstract works like *3XX3* can still be heard throughout the disc, but here, they're harnessed to the task of evoking the sugary giddiness of institutionalized gambling. The songs and melodies are infectious, and the overall conception of the package is strong, linking hieroglyphic images with repetitive slot machines imagery (punctuated with words like 'JACKPOT JACKPOT JACKPOT' and 'WIN WIN WIN').

A limited number of the 'Special Edition' version of this disc may still be available from the label. It contains a nice hand-sewn/screen-printed draw-string bag which contains the CD, some gambling chips and playing cards with Bran (...) Pos stickers on them, an Egyptian penny under plastic, and a few buttons, as well as a notecard which advises you to contact the label if the two cards in your edition add up to 21, as you will be eligible for yet another prize. I, as usual, did not win.

BT.HN.
Her Serpent CD
PACrec / PAC 137

BT.HN.
Vitiated LP
Dogma Chase / DOGMA 06

BT.HN.
Valastro cs
Cipher Productions / (sic 51)

BT.HN.
Rawmada cs
Lake Shark Harsh Noise/Rundownsun / HN #04/No. 43

OK, I think I get it now. BT.HN. actually IS different from Ba.Ku. It's not just a name change, it's a directional change. That's why I think I wasn't initially warming to releases like *Black Mirrors and Dark Planet Alignment* (LP on Rundownsun) or *Forbidden Barrier* (Mistape). Since I was living under the misconception that BT.HN. is still some sort of Occult-driven Power Electronics band, I was lamenting the near-total lack of inhumane, reptilian vocals croaking out from the depths of the dark pools, or all the great samples from '60s Satanic-themed horror films. Now that I know that BT.HN. is an alternate-universe sister-group to The Rita, one in which harsh walls are invoked not with long chains of distortion pedals, but other, presumably more feedback-laden methods, and now that I know that Ba.Ku. is no more, it's easier to analyze the new records on their own merits.

Of the four releases here, *Her Serpent* is the most punishing and aggressive. 'Maggie's Rim' is 30 minutes of hot asphalt dumped onto the pain receptors of your brain, not a gravelly crackle like The Rita, but a tarry, viscous glop as its center, steam bubbles of feedback break and popping at the surface at uneven intervals. It's a heady brew, and contains enough thought-neutralizing viciousness that it probably would have stood alone just fine as an album. The second track, 'Garter Choke,' is more boring (as in boring holes, not uninteresting), and more active, with many rising/falling sonorities rolling down the surface. The multi-layered feedback worship reminds me quite a lot of various Richard Ramirez tapes, a multi-pronged attack on the layered noise ritual in which your mind is constantly given four or five different lines and positions to concentrate on, endless details to be scrutinized, multiple layers all working against each other in one track. One of the most suffocatingly harsh titles on the PAC roster.

By comparison, the *Vitiated* LP, which is pressed into thick, cleanly-pressed vinyl for a very full sound and housed in a thick cardstock cover with embossed metal plate attached to the front and liner noted affixed inside, is less barbarous and more elegant. It is to BT.HN. what *Nobody's Ugly* was to Consumer Electronics — unexpected but potent. Whether the addition of Josh Rose (of Sick Buildings and the Rundownsun label) to the lineup marks a change in direction is unclear, but *Vitiated* sounds little like previous BT.HN. recordings. Starting out as a heavy but benign multi-tonal drone, clots of hot garbage start to get thrown over the wall, dirtying up the chromatic hum. The drone compresses to a pinpoint, allowing the chain of RAT/Big Muff/whatever pedals to conduct their elemental crackling. Layers of clean sound and dirty static overlap and intersect, like trying to line up two oscillator lines that are out of phase. Sometimes they come together, creating a sill hum, and then break apart again, creating physical disruption. Side Two is immediately more rugged, with low, LOW-end rumbling bursting with violent crackles, like an earthquake jostling a warehouse full of oil barrels. A deeply buried sound that might be voices breaks through, the first time it's be possible to discern a vocal element. *Vitiated* is for the texture-hounds, people who have heard enough noise to know what they like, and who are, much like McKinlay and Rose's brethren up in the HNW-obsessed north, focused not just on the act of harsh noise creation, but on the specific frequencies and the extensions that can be made within these self-narrowed parameters.

Valastro's Side A is exquisite: quick blast of noise, a long track of grouped voices (I can't discern the language — sounds like Giallo to me, though) before another furrowing-brow blast obliterates the crowd. A series of loud, thunderous clangs punctuate a long vocal sample (French this time?), before ramping up into a fearsome re-entry into the crusty tunnels. The source sound is left to simmer just enough to be heard near the end, and a few vocals come through. Not the lizard-executioner style of earlier Ba.Ku offerings, though, but something more like Power Violence, deep and brutish and, sadly, quite human. Side B is much deeper and bassier, the standard HNW 'bass rumble' acting as the template here, letting it coast into higher crackles before pulling it back into the lows, almost like a two-note melody. The force-field walls within the landscape create some interesting juddering motions while trickles of high feedback appear and recede. It's a great example of control and focus — you can hear exactly what they're going for, and best of all, you can hear them actually hitting it. The track settles into a more conventionally engaging harsh noise style at the end, the low end waves onrushing like a tide of medical refuse over your unprotected feet. One last movie sample is overloaded to the point of clipping, a close-mic explosion of sibilance and voice quality comparable to a gutterball version of 'I Am Sitting In A Room.' Not new, but always enjoyable.

At 10 minutes, *Rawmada* is even more to the point. The initial industrial noise structure isn't particularly inspiring, but will the sublimated sexual longing suggested by the enclosed literature (the insert is a blow-up of escort service listings in the phone book, and a page torn from an old-school smut book is also enclosed) be captured in such a short time? Side One is pretty samey, and didn't initially hook me like the others. Side Two is burlier, with tangled, knotted bumps of subway-shriek feedback. A few strange, almost fumbling, volume shifts are troubling. The tape redeems itself near the end with some really vicious blizzard screaming, but by the time it's done, I'm kind of glad it's over (even though it's a mere 10 minutes long).

Sadly, *Rawmada* is the first BT.HN. I'm not particularly fond of. While I'm guessing that some sort of half-hinted backstory may make this material more important and personal for the participants (maybe McKinlay and Rose fucked some hookers in their hotel in NYC on tour?), the actual sound (and even the presentation, which works the lowest-common-denominator 'addicted to whores' angle) lacks the fierce individuality of the better BT.HN. works. Fortunately, this tape is effectively sold out everywhere, so your temptation to spend money on it won't be that intense, unless you're a BT.HN. completist. Newcomers should start with *Her Serpent*, or, even better, the recently issued *Retrospective* CDr on Pointless Black to see the early side of this great project.

DAN BURKE / THOMAS DIMUZIO
Upcoming Events CD
No Fun Productions / NFP32

Cobbled together from three live performances in three days (San Francisco, Oakland, and Los Altos Hills, California), *Upcoming Events* is a continuous mix that pairs sonic veterans Dan Burke (Illusion of Safety) with Thomas Dimuzio (Due Process, Dimmer), fusing their dead-eyed industrial atmospheres into a future-present world of high-tech paranoia. The theme is readily apparent from the front cover, a bleak-humored photo juxtaposing authoritarian control (several rows of police in riot gear, standing at the ready) and Western notions of 'Bread and Circuses' (the troops are standing in front of an entertainment complex, an LED sign trumpeting 'Upcoming Events'). If that weren't obvious enough, the track titles ('Freedom Fries,' 'Deregulation,' 'Umbrella Sanctions,' 'Closed Circuit') further add to the mood. If you STILL don't get it, there's a repeated sample in 'Leave Here Right Now,' an exchange between a reporter and a cop:

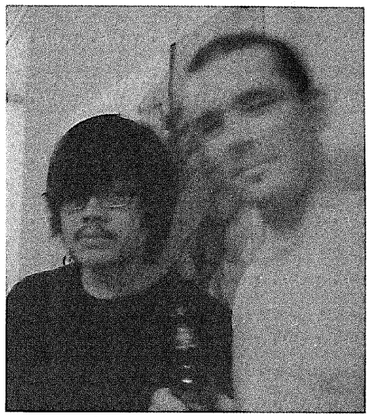
Cop: "Leave here right now!"
Reporter: "I'm a reporter, I'm here to cover the story!"
Cop: "You're under arrest."

Of course, none of this would mean a fig if Burke and Dimuzio weren't such evocative creators of worlds, scattering all these messages within tapestries of endlessly layered, digitized, and detailed sounds of surveillance, all manner of military-grade hums, beeps, static signals, your layers of privacy being stripped away in the name of safety against invisible, often imaginary, threats.

As with the recent Illusion of Safety 10-inch reviewed elsewhere in this issue, I find it interesting that more American acts don't play up this element of society more. A wide majority of American acts retreat into personal fantasies, escapism, or flagellations based on inter-personal trauma. This style of hard, industrial paranoia has gone out of vogue in the US, even as our own freedom to come and go unexamined has diminished drastically in the last five decades.

Not that I think this album will really raise a new social awareness aimed at rolling back warrantless wiretapping and reducing government's ability to chip away at our privacy via some ginned up fears of the Scary Brown Man from Over There -- music doesn't have that power, I don't care what Pete Seeger told you. I just find it interesting that Burke and Dimuzio are among the only ones who seem to be flipping the equation back from 'the personal is political' to 'the political is personal.'

Themes, warnings, and hectoring aside, this disc is great to listen to, a long journey through paranoia-drenched sound environments from two masters with experience going back decades. Recommended for listeners who thrive on paranoia.


C.S.Yeh & Graham Lambkin. Photo by Bill Kouligas

BURNING STAR CORE
Challenger CD
Hospital Productions / HOS-216

Burning Star Core is not a band, but a process, a set of ideas. It can be C. Spencer Yeh performing solo, it can be a psychedelic improv-rock affair with multiple players (most often involving Rob Beatty and Trevor Tremaine of Hair Police, and Mike Shiflet), and sometimes, it's even a big orchestra of people following Yeh's cabalistic tendencies. On this record, though, it's mostly a solo affair, with single-track assists from Tremaine (guitar) and Beatty (jaw harp).

Although constructed primarily with flowing, melodic analogue synth sounds and textures, *Challenger* feels more like a Nurse With Wound album, or better yet, an Alga Marghen reissue. Simple devices (rainstorm sounds, voice samples, pinging electronics) are transformed into an atmosphere more than the sum of its parts via an arcane, seldom-used tool called THINKING. Mondrian moved his lines, patterns, and colored fields around in precise, microscopic ways, judging the composition of the entire field, niggling the balance of the pieces over the course of years, until everything was perfectly placed. *Challenger* has a similarly 'worked' feel to it. Edits almost always come at surprising moments, not with the methodical plodding one expects after listening to hundreds of similar recordings, but in jarring, surprising combinations. Audio colors are contrasted purposefully, not always played to complement each other, but to stand in stark contrast from one another.

The opening track (also the album's title piece) mixes strange, twinkling keyboard sounds with tapes of pressurized, sterile airport room-tone. 'Through the Bars of a Rhyme' has tense, far-off organ, with echoing sounds that seem like someone is dropping a large piece of wood in the adjacent room. The tense, alien atmosphere, one that evokes the daily routines of an alien culture completely unrecognizable to us, resembles many of the set pieces on the first Tart album, *Radio Orange*. 'Mezzo Forte' starts with a fast blur of voice samples, stuttering them into time-stretch oblivion. Smoky piano chords manage to make the environment more unsettling, and by the time the smoldering columns of Tremaine's noise guitar vanish at the end of the track, your equilibrium is thrown off for a few seconds, a brief dizzy spell that underscores the contradictory set of vibrations the track was inflicting on you.

The album is well named. Nothing about this concise album is particularly accessible or predictable, though neither is it harrowing in the in the manner of, say, Runzelstirn & Gurgelstøck — it's about experiencing the joy of unpredictability, not listening in a state of perpetual flinch, waiting to be suckerpunched. If so much of the *Revue OU* box set on Alga Marghen is so exhilarating, it's partly because we get to hear artists producing a lot of innovative, fresh concepts with a minimum of fancy gear. To overcome technical restrictions, each person had to develop their own language, bringing more to the technology than the technology brought to the person. This is one of the few recordings I've heard in the past 10 years that has a higher ratio of human input into the machine than machine input into human. Yeh genuinely dominates his simple tools, treating them neither as a crutch nor a piece of costume jewelry. Quite possibly the most definitive Burning Star Core release to date.

C.C.C.C.
Early Years 4 x CD
No Fun Productions / NFP20

Even with the sudden onrush of archival and unreleased C.C.C.C. recordings over the last two years, this 4CD box set, documenting the very earliest incarnations of the group, is still the most essential in-print C.C.C.C. release on the market. Why? It's not just that this set is an historical look at the roots of this group, but it documents the growth of one root of the modern harsh noise imperative. Traveling through these nearly four hours worth of recordings, you hear a group making the transformation from the '80s post-Industrial clatter-and-bang improv school (equally influenced by '70s Krautrock and The Nihilist Spasm Band) into the mid-'90s ultra-saturation Japanoise sound that held sway over the idea and methods of noise creation pretty much until the start of this century.

Disc One's opening track, the first of three tracks recorded over a four month span at Senegawa Gospel, Tokyo, features the group's earliest incarnation, a duo of Hiroshi Hasegawa (on guitar) and Mayuko Hino on 'metal plate, voices, performance.' The piece progresses slowly, little more than squalling fuzz guitar and occasional clangs of the metal plate. Hino's cold, detached spoken-word sequence partway through the piece is somehow more frightening than some of her unhinged screams on later recordings. She sounds like she's reading out airplane departure times, but it's probably from DeSade or something for all I know. All of this on a recording with lots of room tone, and lots of amp buzz (two things that would later become anathema to Japanese noise recordings), suggest an urban ritual, and while it probably loses something without the visual element, it already shows the project already reaching out into new terrain. For all of the Japanese bands for whom noise was all about violence, either physically (Hanatarashi, early Hijokaidan) or sonically (Merzbow, Incapacitants), C.C.C.C.'s austere, hallucinatory fever-dream must still have come as a shock.

Eventually, the group came to its signature sound, a loud, punishing form of Butoh noise, but on these early releases, you get to hear the zig-zag path they took along the way. For much of Disc One, this material distinguishes itself from the group's better-known material by its overall liveliness. The group was keen to throw everything at the wall: witness the arpeggiating keyboards from Hasegawa, the busy, melodic bass from Ryuichi Nagakubo, the Industrial-era drum machine and clattering, rhythmic metal percussion from Fumio Kosakai (an early member of the group who also split time as half of Incapacitants). While still intrinsically ritualistic and methodical in its approach, you can hear a lot more of their love of '70s German synth sounds on these early tapes, not to mention the dirty Industrial sound of early tapes by Dissecting Table and K2. When an improvisation is going slack, a younger group's first instinct might be to change direction, to try something new, to just keep throwing ideas out until something sticks. C.C.C.C. eventually learned how to direct their improvisations on a more minimal, intuitive level, but at this point, it's really interesting to hear the ideas that were thrown out as needed to keep the flow going.

It's the third recording from Gospel where, as Don Dietrch said of a track on the third Borbetomagus album, "you can really hear the blending for the first time." It was on this recording that the group understood that overloading the mix and the room can lead to something new/different. Once that level of intensity is reached, a gradual process of paring back can be heard...the melodic bass underneath is felt more than heard, the synth arpeggios dry up, and it's no more Mr. and Mrs. Nice Guys as the group start to head toward a collective point where the brain shuts off, and a no-mind meditation point replaces it.

Actually, there are a lot of similarities with Borbetomagus in this group's evolution. Both bands had a sound that's both raucous/raw and also static/meditative, based in intuitive improvisation, and entirely dependent upon action and reaction of individual forces...each element seems to push constantly against a corresponding counterpart of equal force. You get this cage of energies, any of which on their own would be wholly destructive, but somehow, pushing against each other as they do, they all turn into something that's almost still, if not actually silent.

'Live at Gargoyle Mechanique' (Disc Three, track two) is the most overloaded and violent so far. Again, the push-broom bass creates little undertows, two-note melodies that anchor the whole production, much like Tim Wright's bass anchored the later DNA tracks. Disc Four presents the only two tracks on this box set that are previously released. 'Phantasmagoria' (originally released as a tape on Endorphine Factory in 1992) is the point where the band clicks...HARD. This is the point where the whirlwind becomes a perfect storm. High, wheedling synths, brain-altering resonances, sympathetic drones, all meshing into a fearful entity, a collection of sympathetic layers of individual noise creation coalesced into a solid block, caged by its specific (mostly high) frequency levels, bucking and kicking internally without damaging the integrity of the structure as a whole. Everything so far seems to have been building to this. This is also the first one where the classic, early '90s 'noise energy' really, REALLY takes off, when the listener's hands start involuntarily clenching and unclenching, the neck starts twitching, and the teeth grit, just a little. Before this, the recordings have sounded like ever-louder free improvisation experiments, but this... this is fucking NOISE. Smears of ringing feedback travel through the crusty static cage, small details in a big, thunderous presentation. Also, by this time, Nakakubo's bass is sadly all but mixed out of the presentation, a sign of the sound to come (white noise sheets, theremin, hailstorms of violent high-ends).

The box set ends with a previously released track from a three-way split CD on Freak Animal with Jalopaz and Alchemy of the 20th Century. This track bookends the box set in that, like the first track from Gospel, it's played as a duo, with only Hasegawa and Hino on electronics, synth, theremin, and vocals. And yes, from the first pressurized blast of synth sizzle, it's a different beast entirely (unsurprising, as this track appears to have been created five years later than its predecessor). 'Magick In The Cave' is more compressed, more internal (there's less of a sense of the room, and more of all of the elements being fed into a mixing board), a solid piece of late-'90s noise. Apart from being an excellent, crippling way to end the set, transitioning us into the standard realms of C.C.C.C.'s much-praised discography, it also contains the first true death-tones on the set so far. Truly brain-drilling, truly violent. Far beyond the cumulous clouds of abrasive feedback that came before, this is a real boxing of the ears, especially around the 14 minute mark. They really go for the jugular with this one.

While this set will be best appreciated by existing C.C.C.C. fanatics who know what came after this, newcomers to the C.C.C.C. canon, especially those with their own noise project, should consider listening to this set for an object lesson on the ways in which a project can take an existing set of sounds and extend it even further, pushing itself into the purest, most molten incarnation of itself. No matter how good you think you are right now, your sound could always transform radically in a year's time, provided that you're willing to break down your sound and extend it to its most logical conclusion. A frightening, and ultimately, inspiring, slice of Japanese noise history.

CLOAMA
'In the State of Unbelief' 7-inch
(limited edition w/ bonus C-10)
Cipher Productions / (sic 31)

With Cloama's ties to Strom.ec and the Finnish Power Electronics scene, you can bet that this is all about building the sonic war machine — huge booms, deep digital reverb, and a thin layer of cybernetic oil sealing and seasoning the entire presentation. The title track is instrumental, clenched fists still jabbed in pockets, but no concrete message. B-side's 'The Spy Who Came In from the Cold' starts with a sample about 'conspirators... scum' before launching a paranoid stream of morse-code chatter, introducing the tale based on a familiar archetype — the spy, deployed into the heart of enemy territory, neglected or unable to return or assimilate into the homeland. Jasse Tuukki's raspy howl toughens up the lyrics: 'He had to learn/New language/Drink vodka/Stolichnaya/Like a veteran/ Not to spit in the mug/Double identity/Red minds wear red clothes/The man who came in from the cold/A man who lived in lies/For so long/Forget to come back from the cold/Blue in the face.' Lots of wordless screaming as well...it's a harrowing track.

If you can spare the cash, and if it's still around by press time, it really is worth hunting down a copy of the limited-to-50 special edition of this record, in which both sides are enhanced with an additional c10 cassette. A-side's 'In the State of Unbelief' cashes its check here, with the vocals expounding further on the instrumental. Mammoth industrial turbines drive this track, and Tuukki's high-speed vocals rush us through history and its persecution of prophets of all stripes. Such a powerful track, it's a shame that it must be hidden on the limited-edition version — imagine going to a movie, and finding out that if you wanted to find out who killed the main character, you had to attend a screening of the film in the first week only, and pay $25 for a ticket. Adding tchotchkes (and this has lots of them — a Cloama sew-on patch, two buttons [a bottle of Stoli on one, and a picture of the statue of Christ the Redeemer in Brazil on the other, the context of which the lyrics explain amply] several hi-quality inserts, with the whole shebang housed in a nice reel-to-reel box) is a pretty standard 'special edition' trick, but to continue the narrative only for those that pay? Seems like kind of a shame. (Incidentally, the instrumental b-side of the tape continues the claustrophobic tale of the 'spy,' but doesn't add any new layers of meaning, just harsh nuance.) Still, I paid, I'm happy, and even for those of you who didn't, this 7-inch by itself is no slouch.

CONSUMER ELECTRONICS
Crowd Pleaser LP
Hand To Mouth / Hand To Mouth 1

I'm in a minority, and even though I have often been told that I'm wrong, I consider Power Electronics to be something of a spent force which should have been left in a shallow roadside ditch some miles back. The only reliables are the long-termers, such as Aspa, Balistreri, Dando and Solotroff, who, like Bruce Lee before them, offer glimmers of hope to undisciplined imitators masquerading as badboys, who pull their bedroom mirror moves whilst securely decked out in military surplus, fan-boy t-shirts and topped with the obligatory peaked black cap. As sweeping generalisations go, it would seem that the ranks of these vanilla dullards are constantly being expanded by an influx of players recruited from the straight-jacketed ranks of the Hardcore and Metal circuses, where the flock mentality is the unwritten law, and imposing their one-size-fits-all scene regulations a hobby. It's this safety-in-numbers approach and scene molding that snuffs out unique, individual voices, miring us in a pit of the same old tired clichés and opinions. I want my PE to be delivered as a genuine insight into a particular artist's mindset, not by somebody with identification issues flaunting his supposedly 'private' 'obsessions' (which are, amazingly, the exact same as everybody else's on his mailing list) in front of his little playmates, unsure, unable or unwilling to stand on his own two feet. And I want some cold distance to the subject, coupled with a bit of vague mystery, both of which seem to be lacking from today's team-players. That's why the individual indiscretions of, say, George Michael are far more invigorating and interesting than the tedious clichés of the rock 'n' roll lifestyle exhibited by Mötley Crüe, doing exactly what they're expected to do in that position they hold.

It's the unique, peculiar traits that separate the driven from the masses, fuelling a need that pushes the artist to do what he has to do without any concerns for recognition, let alone acceptance. Nobody in PE should be looking to bond, and nobody should be serious about asking others what their next move should be. Which piece of art is actually a genuine reflection of the artist is tough to pin down, and let's face it, 'authenticity' has always been the greatest deceiver in rock music, but still, contemporary PE, with its sad parade of needy attention-seeking scenesters stretches tolerance levels. Mine, anyway.

These dismal trollops will continue with their playground bravado, pushing and shoving each other around at shows, rallying their internet warrior buddies, naked and exposed with full decks dealt, at least until the big boys, watching from a distance, finally step out from behind the bikesheds and demand that the kids hand over their pocket-money. With *Crowd Pleaser*, that demand is finally made.

It would have been far too easy for somebody as highly regarded within PE's hierarchy as Philip Best to have bandied these recordings around any number of safehouse labels and demand his own terms, but it's a testament to the project's individuality and belief in self that he took the hard option and oversaw the whole production on his own. It's given aid along the way from Mattin (who had to leave his philosophy books behind) and long-term accomplice Gary Mundy, as well as the absolute craftsmanship of Rashad Becker during the mastering stage, which makes the whole album fucking bullet-proof.

The lyrical onslaught never lets up from the off, and is snarled out with a rapid-fire intensity. A constant stream of polemic, surging forward, switching from bitter to puzzled, but always lacking any trace of empathy whilst operating without a safety-net of buzzwords. The muzzled restraint which highlighted his work with the two most intriguing tracks on Whitehouse's *Asceticists* 2006 album, and which everyone had expected for the No Fun Productions LP (*Nobody's Ugly*), is blown apart and the results are delivered with the most effective, fractured viciousness a record has hurled forth in a long time.

Side Two allows the librarian and wordsmith to stand aside and lets the musician through. Like *Nobody's Ugly*, this features another highly precise instrumental construction which, whilst having none of the jagged shards strewn across it like the outbursts on the first side, builds on wailing tones and hits like a sneak-attack from the SAS, in and out within a few minutes. Minimum fuss, maximum impact. (Steve Underwood)

CRANIOPAGUS/CLIMAX DENIAL
Split 7-inch
Razors & Medicine / 005

Craniopagus roars right out of the gate with a distorted tide of synth, beaching some truly disgusted vocals onto the shore. The entire sound-field feels trapped behind frosted glass, like Man Ray's *L'etoile de Mer*, artfully but frustratingly obscured. Track two ('Pest') comes on even stronger, like a house-fire at the other end of town, the audio captured through a portable phone mic, the obscured shouting resembling firemen on megaphones, ordering people to jump out the second floor window even though there is no padded surface for them to land on. Punchy, unsettling.

Climax Denial presents two prized possessions from his own personal trophy room of filth. Track one is especially effective when Alex's commanding voice eases back into an almost tearful submission, a slight wash of 'pretty' keyboard dourly complementing the monotonous hum. Track two offers no concession, and 'Stunted Growth' turns the conciliatory gestures in track one into an unabashed lunge for the throat, with chattering, electronically-derived junk-sounds and shouted vocals. Again, lyrics would be nice — libretto, people, we need the libretto! Nice glossy fold-over sleeve, classy and ambiguous photo inside...Razors & Medicine has a great sense of aesthetic presentation.

JASON CRUMER
Ottoman Black CD
Hospital Productions / HOS-215

Although Crumer's individual releases go into the low double-digits now, he considers *Ottoman Black* only to be his third 'full-length' release. (The others being *Hum of an Imagined Environment* [CD on Ignivomous] and *Future With No Chance* [LP on RRRecords]. A fourth CD, titled *Walk with Me*, has been recently released on Misanthropic Agenda.)

Ottoman Black is a masterful damn record, a definitive statement that makes most other noise records of this ilk seem immature, if not outright stillborn. From Dom Fernow's photography, presenting mundane situations with an air of isolated, hysterical desperation, to the track titles, presented in the style of an academic outline (I., II., a., b., etc.), this is a formally conceived and meticulously crafted 35 minutes, leaving nothing untied or untidy.

Strip away the stern façade, however, you find real emotions, evocative atmospheres, violent physical actions, and a few sequences of lightning-fast harsh noise. Starting with 'Town Crier,' a dark, oppressive atmosphere is established — I imagine being in an isolated corner of Salem, Massachusetts, a long way away from the town square where witches are being burned, the fear and contempt wafting through the town, the whistling winds and far-off clangs portending actions which can't be undone. Intensity is escalated on 'News Rips Through the Community,' as inhumane wails signal an uptick of force, constantly ascending like a free-jazz eulogy. Everything rises to a tremendous metallic roar. Would I be too hyperbolic to mention Freudwerk? Maybe so, because soon the track begins to deflate itself, winding down to a dolorous synth dirge.

With 'Self-Deceiver,' deep grunts and spectral whines collude with some fast-cut voice chaos appearing and disappearing, like doors closing all around you. Just as we get further into the moment, the fourth track, 'Where Were You?' jolts us from the abstract into the direct with very physical sounds of punching, gagging, choking, and slapping, a Schimpfluch-esque feast of body agony. This develops into loops of marching sounds and something that resembles the sound of hitting a metal storage rack in a dank basement. If this record is about some sort of hostile takeover of a community (as track titles like 'News Rips Through The Community' and 'Town Crier' indicate), then this is the sound of an attack battalion sweeping down for the first salvo.

The battle is finally brought into a full-blown pandemonium with 'Betrayal After Betrayal After Betrayal,' the first truly harsh track so far. 'Betrayal''s speed and dexterity, not to mention its enormity, harkens back to the late-'90s Pain Jerk/K. Endo/ Sewage school of whiplash pedal-dancing, with roaring delay-squelch fireworks shooting sparks and combining with low-end industrial burn, a cloud of whirling knives and punching fists aimed at your unprotected throat. Everything you like about noise is in this track, but it doesn't last long (five and a half minutes), so savor it.

The next two tracks are titled 'After Betrayal' and 'After Betrayal,' continuing the sentence started in the prior title. The first 'Betrayal' cools down the cauldron with junk rattle, ambient synth, and a few basic chords played on an organ, with a great build-up of the atmospheres thanks to some asymmetric loops. The next track is another static-y noise monster, more betrayal in the form of a rising, powerful wall of harshness. Big, blaring and textured, the track starts moving at the two minute mark, with airy, nebulous sounds gathering, simulating the feeling of flying high above the atmosphere before catching fire in re-entry.

'Nothing Could have Stopped This' is a loop of... marching? Clapping? Something rhythmic and stern, anyway, that eventually fades to silence, occasionally skipping a beat. The war machines leave, but not before more gagging sounds, the last

survivors being choked (Or maybe slapped? Or... drowned?) by the departing armies on their way out of town. 'Pissed-Off Response' is just that, a six-second outburst that barely registers as its own track unless you're watching the CD counter.

The album ends with the majestic 'Certified Blues,' a beautiful, tense climax of monolithic organ chords that stand as perfectly worthy against some of Messien's organ pieces. Seems like everybody who touches an organ thinks they can play one (just put your fingers on enough keys, and something big and heavy is bound to come out), but Crumer plays these organ progressions perfectly — if this section is through-composed, I wouldn't be the slightest bit surprised, and if it's improvised, it's time to give out the Miles Davis 'Rated X' award for this issue. We aren't given a peaceful resolution, but a muted one, burying the dead with handfuls of our own grief.

Ottoman Black is in the very highest percentile of achievement, the top one percent of the top one percent of noise albums that came out in 2008. It is not something to nod off to, or put on while washing dishes, but a 35-minute symphony of dread, distress, and yes, betrayal. At the same time, the sheer depth of technological achievement (great sound/mastering/technical know-how) makes it an engaging listen, and will assuredly continue to give up new information with multiple listens. Highest recommendation.

Dieter Müh. Photo by Mark Wharton

DIETER MÜH
'Aakal/Nostrum/Earblind' 7-inch
Harbinger Sound / HARBINGER031

Dieter Müh, it should be said, are dependable to a fault, built like an engine (no pings, no knocks), and have for years churned out huge, clean, cavernous industrial menace just like Mother used to make. They link naturally and proudly with their industrial forebears, unashamed of vocals loops (a practice seemingly criminalized in the '00s for how few people use them any more), pounding industrial percussion, and even touches of world music exoticism, mostly used keening wails rather than plink-plonk zither jolliness.

These sessions, recorded in 2001-2002, place the two primary members in quarantine, with Steve Cammack's side-long single track 'Aakal' on side one and Dave Uden's 'Nostrum' and 'Earblind' on side two. If this record is to be offered as evidence, we get an interesting take on who brings what to the garden party. Cammack's side is all lowing foghorns and rustling dockside ambience, with a growing industrial roar like a slow-moving barge approaching. A wheezing, parched voice loop grows in the final moments, a slow build to modern nausea.

Uden's two tracks are more rhythmic and ordered, and he seems to be the person to bring the chain-on-scrap-metal ferocity to the group while Cammack provides the queasy atmospheres. 'Nostrum' grows into a sickly, gristly mouthful of gargled Teflon and iron filings, with synths ascending and descending to a fearsome climax. 'Earblind' starts with a tape-delayed voice loop concerning 'today's interest in magic' and how this is 'a sign of mental illness...mental illness...mental illness...' It follows through on its stern warning with subhuman vocal loops, whispers, and general paranoia. Pressed on lovely pukey-colored camouflage vinyl in thick double-foldover sleeve.

EMACIATOR
Coveting LP
Not Not Fun / NNF 131

EMACIATOR
Reflection 2LP
Accidie Records / a/r 01

EMACIATOR/SINKING BODY
Split LP
Monorail Trespassing / mt63LP

It's hard to remember now, but Emaciator started out as a diversion from Jon Borges' primary project, Pedestrian Deposit. Actually, backing up further, Emaciator started out as an anonymous project, listed in the Monorail Trespassing distro section as a mysterious band that sent copies of their tapes for Borges to sell. After a few releases, Borges admitted that he was the force behind this Broken Flag-influenced project, and the tapes (for they were all tapes at this point) started arriving faster after that. The style, every bit as dirty and raw as the BF-derived artwork (right down to the black-on-white/black-on-blue-with-a-black-border-and-military-photo design) would have you believe, was quite welcome during that period of time when this sound and approach was not particularly in fashion (at least one year before the game-changing release of the Broken Flag box set).

Gradually, the tapes started getting shorter and less violent, trading the rough static and shortwave for melancholic and brittle keyboard and guitar meditations. Beginning around summer 2007 with the first two Emaciator releases on CDr (*Remorse*, a 3-inch on emr, and *Resentment*, a full-length on Students of Decay), the modern Emaciator style began to take shape, no longer taking its influence from early Industrial and Power Electronics, but based in, to quote its own statement of intent, "progression; evolution; hybrids; early industrial / drone / psych-noise / bliss / meditation / therapy." The tapes still charted incremental progress, and ambitiously tried many different moods and styles, some of them still quite morbid, others more contemplative. Whether you liked the style or not, the Emaciator style was always developing and extending into new areas. Starting in 2008, Emaciator released its first vinyl offerings, one single and one double LP, and in 2009, a split LP became the inaugural vinyl on Borges' own Monorail Trespassing label.

Coveting, a single LP released on the Not Not Fun label, opens with fizzy, shimmering chords, each note briefly rising through the static to break the surface of the water. 'Perseverence,' starts more aggressively and fiery before reverting to ponderous, largely acoustic (save for a bit of delay) guitar strums, accompanied only by electronic representations of the wind, kind of like a spaghetti western. 'Recurring' made me think of Wire's *154*, specifically the furious crescendo on 'A Touching Display,' which is high praise indeed if you ask me. I dimmed the lights...it seemed like the right thing to do. Side Two's 'A Premonition' builds to the first really noisy climax on record. After a quick fade, it returns in an even fuzzier mode before adding 'played' guitar (as opposed to 'struck' guitar or 'raked' guitar). The 12 minute closer, 'No One Will Ever Know,' ends with a long, arpeggiated picking section, evoking nostalgia. Of the three vinyl pieces, this has the most guitar on it, the most quiet optimism, and the most radiance, so beware if you're the kind of misanthrope that finds such things abhorrent.

The *Reflection* 2LP is an entirely more somber affair, perfect for those looking to hear a vinyl evocation of the early days of Emaciator, the more grim death-industrial modes evoked on albums like *Whitewash/Days Without Fear* and *Triumph*. Sides One and Four are said to be mirror images of one another, not in the sense that one is played backwards, but that they form a sort of matter/anti-matter union, each occupying the other's negative space. Side One is crackling, far-off chords, sounding like a downcast silent-film soundtrack coming out through the window of a castle in a rainstorm. Black-and-white in sound, depressive, cyclical. This initial grinding loop is overlaid with sympathetic drones that take the form of low buzzing and crackle. These new layers overcome the distant grinding of the initial loop (the buzzing is finally identifiable as guitar after a few minutes). A mood of quiet, dignified melancholy permeates, like a king in exile, locked in a room and pondering his final days. Not a lot happens, but it happens majestically.

The 'lonely lighthouse keeper' atmosphere on this record reminds me of a more gritty take on Idea Fire Company's *Anti-Natural*, particularly on Side Two's 'Dishonesty.' The best of the four sides, in my opinion — tundra contemplation.

Side Three starts with fields of static bursting like blisters over deep electrical forcefield drones, billowy processing on single guitar notes, two or three notes shimmering to the surface. More sympathetic resonances on open chords with jackhammering shortwave static that lines everything like a layer of down feathers. Very potent sound. There's a palpable difference in approach, desired result, and emotional tenor between this and *Coveting*.

Side Four, the 'mirror image,' sounds structurally similar to the first, but with the chord progressions in reverse, maybe? The noisy guitar over top is more metal-thin reverberated, and the fizzing and popping takes more precedence here. Matter/anti-matter, buzz vs. melody, clarity vs. drudgery. The most potent and memorable of the three vinyl releases.

Infinite Body's side of the split LP is shimmering guitar drone, not drastically different from the current Emaciator style, but a bit more friendly and open-armed. This is what 'the kids' are into these days, I'm told. It sounds like the sunrise, but more sugary-sweet. Track two is more inviting — some synth that is 'Driven by the human voice,' according to the liner notes. Like condoms in porno, this style is fine for some, but I object on ethical grounds. Emaciator's track, by comparison, is darker and drearier, like helicopters over a frozen, fog-shrouded lake at 5:23 a.m., just as the sky starts to change. Discordant hums and buzzes remind me of the opening sequence to *The Holy Mountain*. The track doesn't really progress much, but I like it just the way it is. The side concludes with a pretty little piano coda. The cover and design are gorgeous, as well; an auspicious start to what will hopefully be a long line of vinyl offerings from Mr. Borges and his label.

Déficit Des Années Antérieures (D.D.A.A.)
Action And Japanese Demonstration CD
Fractal Records / Fractal333

There's no doubting Fractal's credentials in the reissue market, what with their wonderful handling of the Ilitch back-catalogue and the semi-legit version of Musique Concret's *Bringing Up Baby*, to name just a few. Now, with the label moving in on the D.D.A.A. archives, maybe we can hope for some recognition for this collection of French weirdos who never get the bizarro credits they deserved back in the day. To be sure, it could be partly because they lack some of the conceptual strength and delivery of, say, Berlin's Die Tödliche Doris, but the imagination flexed not only on this debut long-player but throughout their ignored non-career offers a surreally twisted alternate world that few could come near. Only fellow countrymen Achwghâ Ney Wodei, the people behind that legendary *Triptyque* triple-LP set, could come close. Easier reference points could be made of both NWW and H.N.A.S., maybe. The sleeve on both versions states 'Antimusic.' The reality is that D.D.A.A. were actually very much pro-music.

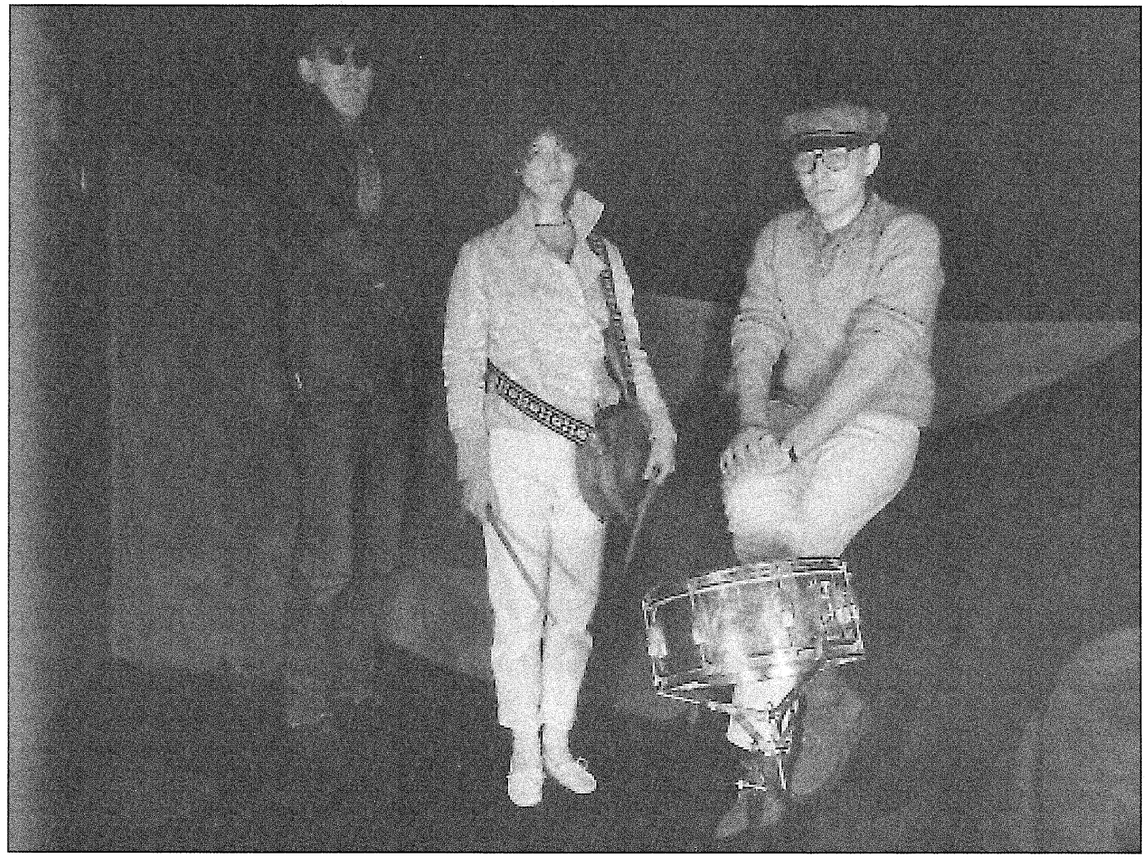
Anyone well-acquainted with the early output of D.D.A.A. and their imprint, Illusion Productions, will be struck immediately at how ineffective the package of this CD is, amounting to little more than a flimsy colour printout for the cover and a poorly-designed booklet hidden inside. The tactile beauty of the original vinyl edition, with its heavy-duty screen-printed wraparound sleeve lost in a digital mess, and the intricate, detailed inserts that were held inside the original are merely scanned and splashed across the pages in a hotchpotch style in the CD booklet.

A great shame, as it was those original handcrafted releases that inspired Nagako Takechi and Koji Tano to put together those wonderful, over-the-top packages that adorned so many early MSBR limited editions. For a new generation of eager minds and active hands, let alone the down-/free-loaders who are foolish enough to believe that the complete package is an irrelevance, it's a sadly-missed opportunity to see genuine inventiveness displayed.

Having carried out their 'Adventures En Afrique' on an early seven-inch a couple of years prior to the release of this album, this then-latest cod-travelogue finds our French armchair tourists heading out to the far East for an occidental's fantasy view of Japan, one that's built upon stories of Zen-masters hitting each other with bamboo poles and slurping green tea, rather than the current-day reality of crammed subway carriages and mass depression. Running alongside the regular D.D.A.A. trio are long-term collaborators Bernard C. (whose solo recordings are also prime Illusion Productions releases), and Un Département, all of them offering extra hands with drums and tape duties. This album, with its insane outbursts of imaginary incantations and dialogue layered over plucked koto, flutes and light percussion along with the expected synth and guitar backing, is an attempt at world travel without having to leave the front door, executed without resorting to the awkward and embarrassing pretensions of most 'World Music' practitioners. The success of this album lies in the fact that it holds no real reverence for its inspiration or concerns itself about what might be considered culturally out-of-bounds.

Despite the addition of two additional (minor) tracks from the same sessions and a too-large, and, alongside this record, too-distracting section of an obscure 1985 cassette release, it still all holds up. Even if one considers that with contemporary, and somewhat humorless, sensibilities, some of this might be construed as simply 'taking the piss.' Still, the humour is slightly more evident here than it is on the journey those more famous imaginary tour-guides The Residents took us with their *Eskimo* album. There's even parts of this CD that could be passed off as snippets culled from some old Lyrichord album; hard-nosed musicologists wouldn't be able to snipe the fake, and it would likely leave them puzzled — always a sign of a job well-done. Still a landmark album. (Steve Underwood)

D.D.A.A. Photo by PCarre



DINO FELIPE
No Fun Demo CD
No Fun Productions / NFP31

To these pop-addled ears, this record is in no league with '90s indie-pop smarm factories like Xiu Xiu (as some have suggested), but proudly hangs its hat on the heavy oak banister of the godfathers of '70s smart-pop, especially the works of the merry recluses. I can hear flashes of all of my favorite psychotic geniuses: Roy Wood, R. Stevie Moore (especially his new-wave-ier offerings), pre-Ambient Brian Eno, Alex Chilton post-Big Star, but with an open-hearted and confessional vocal style that reminds me of South American psych projects like We All Together or Traffic Sound. And I guess if I listened to Momus, this would probably remind me of him, too...I get that same smart-guy vibe.

This is all filtered through the modern tendency of not spending money on good mics so you can buy more beer. The cloudy, reverb-y vocal sound (exacerbated by multiple layers of vocals) often obscure the lyrics (Felipe only allows his un-processed, single-tracked voice to appear a few times on the album). As a result, you get a collection of killer pop GESTURES, but few songs that actually stick with you — without a lyric to hold onto for more than a song or two, you never really build a relationship with this record as you would with, say, *Boulders* or *Phonography* or *Joy of a Toy*.

I mean, this CD has hooks for MILES — listen to 'Play My Tape' and try to get the repeated chorus of 'Don't tell aneeeyonnnne...' out of your head. Thing is, it almost seems more like an encyclopedia of inspired hooks, a notebook more than an album of memorable songs, and again, I gotta bring it back to the vocals. The lyrics are so buried most of the time, you're never able to really connect with a song's essence. You can nod along, but you can't get into Felipe's worldview, which I think is the place where the connection is usually made.

Felipe's debut for No Fun keeps you at arm's length, wowing you with his considerable talent and showing off every tool is his collection, but in the end, you don't come away from the encounter feeling like you've gotten to know Felipe at all. This is why I like Azalia Snail, but I love Joni Mitchell... I don't know what the fuck Azalia Snail's talking about.

FFH
'Tiocfaidh Ar La' 7-inch
Gods of Tundra / GOT 266

At last, new meat for hate-hungry Power Electronics scavengers! The well-worn paths around the perimeters of the Brady/Hindley estates, the forlorn boots clacking up and down the red light districts of Bradford, the lonely boys huddled up in schoolyards the world over, can all shuffle toward the land up north. This is Power Electronics based around the legacy of the Irish Republican Army, and the subject matter feels new, even if the Euro mainstays have been championing all manner of social uprising and militarism for decades.

Side One preps the assault rifles amply, but Side Two in particular lays a fine brick to the forehead, with FFH's Richard Dunn really getting to the meat of the matter, bellowing his lyrics with great contempt: 'A nauseating spectacle of provisional leadership/poacher turned gamekeeper/a vote for treachery/no longer republicans/renewed call for immediate and terrible war/the days of following false icons are over/steadfast in allegiance to the destruction of the sovereign state.' As on *Women in the War*, 2007's little-heard collaboration with Prurient, Dunn shows himself to be a commanding vocal presence, barking his declaration through a throat fortified with barely-suppressed psychosis, his backing noise treacherous and ultra-saturated. Great symmetrical packaging, too: green vinyl, plus a pair of green and orange inserts to help you choose up sides.

G*PARK
Reuters LP
Tochnit Aleph / TA 079

With his latest LP, Marc Zeier doesn't just create sound objects, he dominates rooms. The sound pressure emanating from *Reuters* amplifies Zeier's relatively calm, deliberate releases in the 1990s into a storm of environmental fear, incorporating field recordings seemingly based largely on his career as a plankton fisherman. Musique Concrète composer Luc Ferrari, who later in his career eschewed overt flashiness of technique in favor of a more 'anecdotal' style which favored unprocessed field recordings collaged with selective editing, at first seems like a good comparison on this album: as on Ferrari's *Brise-Glace*, Zeier works in an aquatic, arctic territory of field recording, composing 'based on ice, wind, plankton, a whip, a bow, a suitcase, and other recordings made in the last few years.' But G*Park is, after all, a Schimpfluch member, so it'd be foolish to think that Zeier is taking any of this too gently, or too anecdotally in its construction. Ferrari may take you to a shipyard and them move the hands of the clock around, but G*Park transports you to a creaky ship in a frozen sea and then dismantles it, piece by agonizing piece, while suitcases and strange fish keep bobbing out of the water just out of reach and the lifeboat coasts sadly into the horizon.

Although my copy of the LP contains some very egregious pressing issues (there's a lot of crackle in the first few minutes of Side Two), the depth of frequencies is extraordinary, particularly the full-bodied and resonant low-end — all the frightening creaks and snapping sounds are immediate and jarring. Although each LP side is divided into a number of tracks, each piece incorporate enough silence and near-silence throughout as to make each side feel like a whole. There's a strong, clear separation of elements, something I felt was missing from the previous work, 2003's *One Hour as Bernel & Hofmann*, which felt both cluttered and lo-fi, two words I've never before used to describe G*Park. I personally still prefers the two CDs made for Zabriskie Point in the mid-'90s, *Yack Park* and *Geopod*, largely because of their audacious constructions and their Schimpfluch-ian skill with repetition and the tension of sound and silence. Eb.er, Lanz, Phillips, all of them were very aware of the power of rapid jumps from silence to action, and back again, but whereas Runzelstirn & Gurgelstock use all of their sounds as focused attack, punching forcefully out of the silence, G*Park dwells in rich, deep pools of tranquility, out of which alien objects occasionally pop up to the surface like a cork, rotate once or twice, and then submerge again.

Reuters is the best of both worlds, utilizing some of the more caustic textures of the *Seismogramm* LP (recently reissued as a CD by Blossoming Noise) with the structural framework of *Yack Park*'s comparative austerity. *Reuters* is more environmental in nature than either of them (hence the Ferrari comparison), and possibly more barren and full of dread than anything else in his oeuvre. Great, stark presentation by Tochnit Aleph as well.

CARLOS GIFFONI
Adult Life CD
No Fun Productions / NFP40

When I hear something described (as this was in the catalog) as 'pure electronic music,' I think of Morton Subotnick, Rune Lindblad, or Steve Birchall, not Kluster, Cluster, Cluster & Eno, or Tangerine Dream. That might be a communication breakdown on my end, I'll admit. Regardless, when viewed through such a lens, *Adult Life* is rather scant on structures, most pieces boiling down to one line that goes 'whoom whoom whoom,' another that goes 'teedle teedle teedle,' while a slow, two-finger melody creeps over the top. The synths are played 'straight,' not distorted into harsh noise — in that regard, this is 'pure electronic music.' It's tactile music, too, with rich, succulent analogue textures dripping from every held key.

'Son with No Father' is particularly nice, toying with the speed and pitch of synth lines in a quease-inducing manner similar to the drum beat on Hair Police's 'Mortuary Servants,' the speed gradually, almost imperceptibly, speeding up and slowing down throughout. 'This Is How You Pull the Trigger' has a steely, heavy synth bass line, its slow, four-note sequencer pattern taking the raw tone through a variety of inter-dimensional permutations. The palpable danger in this track puts it at the top of this collection.

GRIEFER
Brute Force CD
Deterrent Industries / DETERCD01

Conceptually, this is one of the very few Power Electronics projects to create material relevant to modern lives without focusing on the easy and eternal sex and violence traditions. Plenty of the true Power Electronics legends practice what they preach, and there's no denying that: Grunt = extreme sex, Taint = prostitution, Intrinsic Action = peep shows and NY leather, Atrax Morgue = death. Most, however, are just variants of hero worship/emulation, or standard maintenance through imitation. Hopefully, this project will, at the very least, get people to look at their lives and what is really happening to them, not what they wish was happening, ultimately forcing them to address their reality instead of played-out fantasies. Griefer is about real-life power and control issues, things that affect us more than we realize or accept. This is all material about the internet: hacking, data collection, and network security. As the artist claims, this is 'TRUE INTERNET POWER ELECTRONICS.' The antagonistic internet 'troll' persona is so brilliantly relevant, I can't believe there aren't more bands following this line of thought. Also, great respect to the project name, total internally consistent logic, and it sounds good, too. (For those 'n00bz' who don't know, a 'griefer' is basically an internet bully.)

Griefer creates a sound world of thoughtfully mixed noise textures and drones, metallic rhythms, and heavily distorted/vigilantly yelled vocals. That set of variables establishes the palette for the rest of the album, with enough variations across tracks to justify separate entities. Track titles also help to generate the atmosphere of the lone hacker surrounded by monitors and saturated with paranoia, stuff like 'Pentagon Takes Network Offline,' 'Mpack vs. Storm,' and 'Malicious Iframe.' The attention to textural detail is excellent, with solid bass frequencies holding down each track, allowing the droning mids and highs lots of room to move and float like static ether on a screen. The purpose of the organically-paced percussion doesn't make sense thematically, and I'm left trying to resolve its presence. I feel that a heavier static droning and tonal environment would work better without any earthly pounding. The instrumental track 'JSON' is the most effective piece because of how disconnected and menacingly large it sounds. It's comprised of low static buzzing, some sort of melodic droning, and a phone beep sound (which I really wish had happened more throughout). The final piece, 'Undetectable Virtual Machine,' another evocative title, is a threatening, pulsing beast, with slimy static smears of what may be vocals. Halfway through, some siren tones emerge in the distance. Compositionally, this is great, but I feel the album should have ended more violently.

The major shortcoming of this album is the texturally effective yet thematically useless vocals. They are so distorted that it's almost impossible to make out anything other than him yelling "Facebook!" on the track of the same name. The best vocal moment comes with the hyper-distortion at the end of 'Malicious Iframe.' It would be better to employ more bizarre distortion along those lines more often if the vocals are going to be completely textural. What makes the vocal situation worse is that no lyrics are included, which is unfortunate, because I think Griefer actually has something to say. I would love to read the specifics on what his positions are on all these topics. If this was just sex and murder stuff, I wouldn't care about the details of what was being communicated, but since the content is important, it's frustrating. It would have been very appropriate if, along with the list of government agency IPs, logons, and passwords that are printed on the art, he had included a URL to a .txt file of all lyrics.

While his sounds may be standardized: heavy static drones, yelled vocals, and noisy percussion, the execution is so solid that more meanings arise from the network than would be intrinsic in the stand-alone sounds. Noting the concept behind the project, this is one of the only artists who could use digital textures and have them make complete sense in the context of the project. Strangely, the project doesn't go the full digital route on this release. When the sleeve is opened in the center, you see an image of his arsenal, a mild mannered array of pedals, microphones and metal. I wish a computer monitor, keyboard, and phone had been included. Hopefully, the next release will focus the sound closer to the originality of the concept, with dial tones, cell technology, computer fans, hard-disc grinding, and modem crunch worship.

This is a solid and important first album from someone who will hopefully keep pushing the envelope. He takes a form so based on tradition, and does something relevant while staying aesthetically consistent. No ripper murders or dead hookers here; this is walls of monitors observing while you sleep, massive halls of storage, numerical reduction, your life encoded and stored. I will absolutely be following this project hungrily, hoping he keeps pushing the relevance and techniques into right now, vivisecting the growing legion of threats to privacy and personality. (Nick Henry)

HAEMORRHAGING FETUS
Procreation: A Disease/Tangled Desires LP
Gaping Hole / none

Usually a band's name is the first thing I encounter; unfortunately, I've always been totally uninterested in this project because the name sounds like some low-brow goregrind mp3 mess. Anthony Shaw's other projects include A Machine Called Orgasm and Albert Fish Is My Hero. I guess these names are almost so terrible that they are awesome. Ignoring the unfortunate name, I drop the needle and am pleasantly surprised. With liner notes by Harsh Noise theorist, The Rita's Sam Mckinlay, and the fact that this is a compilation of two releases on the cult Harsh Noise tape label Gaping Hole, it's pretty obvious that this is going to be a brutal onslaught.

Side A, reissuing *Procreation: A Disease*, offers two attacks of scalding hot electronic noise. The first, 'Cankered Womb,' is smooth, with almost liquid layers sliding around, a sort of pooled-up ball lightning environment. There seems to be a delicately peripheral amount of flange applied in the distance. The attention to detail is quite impressive, with an active yet balanced middle ground, hot static high-end layers contrasted with very atmospheric droning low-end static. This is very dense material, but it's no lazy 'Wall Noise.' The second track, 'Stillborn,' is a slower beast of electric tendrils. There are some nice waves and foam lapping this piece, and the title fits the mood, a more paralyzed structure, shock and soft tissue breaking down.

Chronologically a year later, the B side, 'Tangled Desires,' provides a hotter fluid static. I get a sense of a boiling slime bath. I was initially unhappy with the static frequencies showcased on this side, but once acclimated to their heat, I really got into it. The birthing imagery, combined with the gently undulating material, helps to sustain that impression. As on the A side, this is very active yet dense material; events don't stack vertically as much as they follow each other in waves. There are also some excellent moments of release after extended tension builds. Shaw knows how to let his material breathe while he's suffocating us under its weight.

Overall, this is a very clean LP, most definitely of a digital nature. At the very least digitally recorded and treated, and I think the vinyl format helps to breathe life into it. The whole birthing and anti-life atmosphere is actually served well by the clarity of the material, an antiseptic hospital atmosphere. While thematically this is stagnant and unoriginal (I don't sense any grand aesthetic refinement like The Rita; none can surpass the master), it does offer a nice variant on the standards of Harsh Noise. If you're a fanatic for the style, that won't be a major issue for you, and this material is so insanely well done that you'd be a fool not to get it. (Nick Henry)

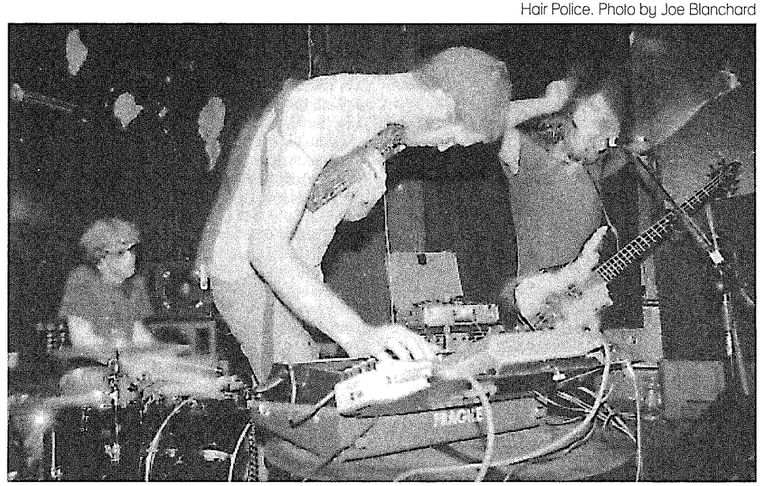
HAIR POLICE
Certainty of Swarms CD
No Fun Productions / NFP39

Certainty of Swarms is, in all ways, culmination and amplification of the primary styles and gestures within the Hair Police arsenal. The thrashy rock parts thrash harder, the ugly set pieces are so much more unsettling, and in general, the stench of rot throughout this disc is just so thick, it's hard to remember that this was the same group who, a scant 6-7 years ago, were a fresh-faced splatter-punk band singing about 'Vocalist Dan Marino,' and challenging its audience to a game of Shirts Vs. Skins.

The progression, however, has been a steady one, and many of the tracks that slick so strongly here have their precedents on previous recordings. The free-spatter opener, 'Strict,' which is in the vein of *Obedience Cuts*' 'Let's See Who's Here And Who's Not,' benefits from variations in percussion densities, electronic hooks (Robert Beatty's air-raid siren electronics), and vocalist Mike Connelly's tightened, choked wailings. 'Intrinsic To The Execution' sounds like a field recording of someone trying to hold Connelly down in an open grave while shoveling dirt on top of him. The reptilian death-throes of the vocals put fear directly into your bloodstream, while the deep, electronic punctuations from Beatty and the waves of gray-spectrum guitar feedback from Trevor Tremaine are utterly miserable. It rises to a fierce, sun-blind finale, before shambling into the next track, 'Paralysis Simulacrum.' Tremaine's clusters of metallic percussion punctuate Conelly's wordless moans, resembling some cross between Leon Thomas and a man dying in the desert. Hell, maybe just Leon Thomas dying in the desert. Again, this mixture of high-gloss/gutter sound is so many steps past free-rock or 'fire music,' it's as if *Blow Out Your Blood* never happened.

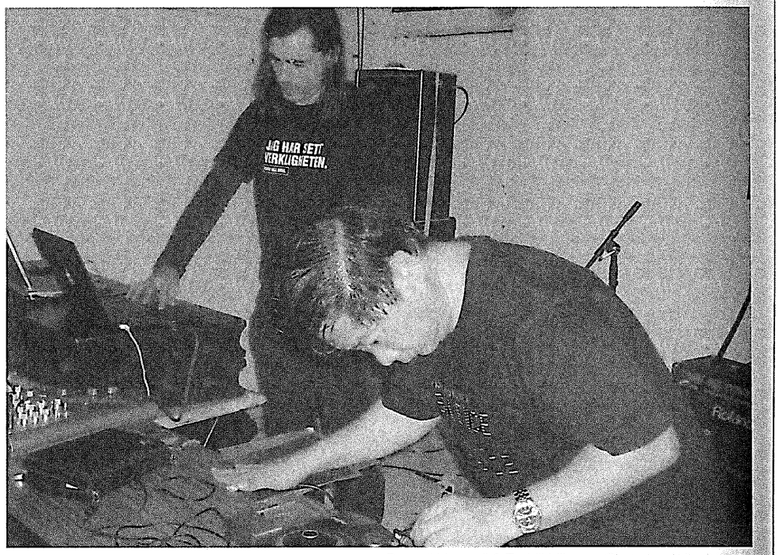
While freeform rock is still the seed at the center of the Hair Police method, the group has been pulling in influences and atmospheres with its insatiable gravitational pull, synthesizing Cold Spring-ian dark ambient textures, whipped-dog Black Metal agonies, European PE vocal declamation, and an ear for detail worthy of modern classical composition — seriously, compare *Swarms*'s 'On A Hinge' with the crispy, shattering textures of Iancu Dumitrescu's 'Pierres Sacres' and see what I mean.

Hair Police. Photo by Joe Blanchard



All of the things Hair Police attempted on past recordings have been viciously refined — they have become the beasts that first slayed them. The reason albums like this will stand the test of time and clowny shit like Deep Jew will not is the group's unceasing refinement of its own horribleness. It's no longer enough just to play louder, harder, or spazzier, nor to justify unanalyzed conniptions as 'the extremes of human emotion.' This album (and the last three or four like it) prove that you can go further, and that you can drive yourself to truly inhuman levels of self-flagellating barbarism by not disappearing into your own asshole, but by listening to yourselves as a group and **PULLING BACK** as needed. You've got to pay attention to how it all sounds and not just look back pridefully at 'how much energy' was harnessed that night.

Hair Police can never again be slighted with a term like 'heirs to the throne of Wolf Eyes.' *Certainty of Swarms* pushes any real or fake rivalry between the two units completely off the table. It's not even a case of dethroning, but more like the construction of a whole new, and adjacent, palace. Like Jason Crumer's *Ottoman Black*, *Certainty of Swarms* takes a genre not known for protracted artistic statements and balances each and every second of the record against all the others. A powerfully sequenced, gripping, utterly masterful album.



Russell Haswell & Toshiji Mikawa. Photo by Akiko Miyake

HALTHAN
Poetic Justice business-card CDr
Corrosive Art / CA-09

Halthan fill their short time here effectively, 'Stanford Society' slowly unwinding dismal synth over a bubbling droned texture, effected vocals igniting the uneasy vacantness as their suffocating tone grinds critical lyrics regarding the human condition. 'Patient/Victim (Part 1)' (of which Part 2 gets no mention here) is just as simple, a clinical female voice intoning revolutionary rhetoric as a swarm of noise readies itself for action which presumably occurs in Part 2.

The pieces here are both strong, and it's another promising step for Halthan, although each track seems to be leading to a larger presentation to which the listener isn't privy — it reminds me in this respect of DVT's 'No Vital Signs' 7-inch on Steinklang, which felt equally introductory. Still, don't let a fear of anticipation spoil any opportunity to pick this release up. (Chris Groves)

RUSSELL HASWELL
Second Live Salvage 2LP
Editions Mego / eMEGO 013

Cold on the heels of the first *Live Salvage* (it's hard to call an eight year span between the two 'hot') comes another calamitous salvo of live laptop concussions that put the 'black' back into "...and that's when everything went black." This volume picks up right where the last one left off, with performances spanning from 2000 to 2007, taking place in a variety of concert halls, art installations, house parties, and other places where people apparently **TALK INCESSANTLY THROUGH EVERY PERFORMANCE**. Really, try to find a track on here where the crowd isn't flapping its gums about whatever the fuck is so much more important than this full-frontal assault on the ears.

Especially unnerving is the track from Fargfabriken, Stockholm, a seriously ominous impersonation of a fleet of mechanical hornets being buffeted in a wind-tunnel, pushing and fighting to break through the safety glass and swarm you. One of Haswell's greatest strengths is his ability to increase intensity without ever succumbing to a clichéd 'big finish.' The track never truly explodes, but stays its own course, logically and methodically. Everything here is rigorously restrained, but not repressed, and you never imagine Haswell would resort to such easy outs as flailing, jumping around, or using 'ecstasy' as his excuse for losing control of the sound.

Track three (Schirn Kunsthalle, Franfurt) sounds like it may have Metal guitar chords as its base, along some nasty drilling tones. As the audience lets out what sounds like an ironic 'wooo!,' Haswell cuts the sound almost entirely to silence, as if asking the audience, "are you finished? Alright, we'll begin again." Bits of Trip-Hop beats, distorted and clipped, appear now and again before being lopped off mid-break, followed by sounds that resemble the clear-cutting of a forest, far-off machines, lasers, and lots of uncomfortable silence — the antithesis of 'building a head of steam.'

Haswell's laptop technique is pretty distinctive — he doesn't go straight to harsh all the time, nor does he take micro-sounds and put them through the rock tumbler to buff them into tiny, glittery gems just behind the wall of hearing. To these ears, his sound is most similar to the grossly underrated Japanese computer-noise act Mono (no relation to the instrumental rock band also from Japan). Mono's series of T-prefixed CDrs (*T-09* and *T-11* on Tochnit Aleph, *T-10* on Solipsism) have somehow fallen through the cracks of canonization. Like Mono, Haswell takes a core set of sounds and sticks with them for the duration; he really works them out. The sounds, the repetition, and single-minded ferocity at the heart of both projects can damn near cause a panic attack.

Check the high-pitched 'note' that gets played on track four (Engine Rooms, Brighton). It's raised and lowered, ascending like Hanatarash's *5 (We Are 0:00)*, keeping everyone on the edge of panic for several minutes, before again dropping it into a pit of digital electricity. At no point does he go for the big 'release,' but just keeps ratcheting up the tension, whipping the tones around like a fish on the line, tiring them out. The crowd responds, inexplicably, by talking through the whole damn thing.

Only the final track, (from IKKI in Kiya Kyushu) really goes full-boat and throws anchor into Harsh Noise waters (is it any wonder that Haswell is joined here by Toshiji Mikawa of the Incapacitants/Hijokaidan?), but still retaining a refreshingly liquid-steel digital malleability to it, the type of tool-specific thing you can and should be doing with a laptop, rather than wiring it up to sound like a vintage synth or a chain of effects pedals.

Haswell has carved a unique corner for himself out of the Harsh Noise field. His releases, few and far between, but also beautifully designed (the cover photo is strange and hilarious, and is placed within a design aesthetic that strongly resembles Keith Jarrett's *The Köln Concert*) and possessed of consistent quality of aggression. It's a hefty price tag on this one, but should be considered essential for listeners interested in both harsh sound in the digital terrain and definitive statements in general.

THE HATERS
Further CD
Transparency / #0322

It's hard to know what to make of this, the most recent album by GX Jupitter-Larsen's long-running entropy unit. Easily the most 'musical' Haters I've heard since the earliest recordings and a handful of comp tracks, *Further* sounds less like The Sound of One Hand Cracking, and more like an out-of-focus, slow-motion version of Einsturzende Neubauten. Transparency, which has released all manner of West coast weirdness, from Speculum Fight to the *Blorp Essette* compilation to Sun Ra and Rufus Harley, here puts its money down on a thoroughly anomalous Haters album.

Track one is 50 minutes long, and seems to be a repeating field consisting of several elements: an Argento-esque organ, riffing on endless horror motifs; monotonous clouds of grit; clattering metal percussion; and sounds that resemble high-pitched female screaming, or maybe wet fingers on plastic. Like a strange, uncomfortable mix-up of Airway and Miles Davis' organ from 'Rated X,' but slower, this exists somewhere between noise and music, the same sequences reappearing again and again, seemingly in the same order. It's hard to tell but this could possibly just a collection of long (like 5-10 minute long) tape loops running endlessly against one another. The organ dramatically plays on a mountain of rubble while the earth smolders below.

The noise lover in me, accustomed to being abused, almost feels guilty listening to something so unabashedly enjoyable. The music listener in me, on the other hand, gets a weird gnawing in the pit of the stomach, as the five elements seem to be endlessly repeating in various permutations; not quite loops, not quite improvised, and never modulating. The track surrounds you like a whirlwind, filling the room with its dust-storm frenzy. The one major difference that happens is around the 45 minute mark, when we briefly hear bird sounds. Or were they always there, just lower in the mix?

The second track, a mere 10 minutes, sounds an awful lot like the first track at five times the speed. The things that sound like industrial percussion in the first track sound a lot more now like some sort of engine idling, or a fan colliding with metal. At this point, the listener starts to wonder how much of the first track's apparent musicality was generated merely through speed controls, or whether any of this was 'played' at all. Regardless of what happened, both tracks are mysterious, inviting, and multi-layered enough to warrant repeat listenings & theories. To repeat: not your average Haters album.

HATERS / FCKN'BSTRDS
Split 7-inch
Dead Mind Records / DMR017

Haters side: Far-off big-room clanging, sounds like a hovering cathedral, Haters-style, standard but good. 'Permawave' is the title, and the title may be a clue to the sources used.

Bstrds side: Starts off like TLASILA for a while, stuttering tape mangle, then breaks into cackles. No seriously, not crackles, cackles...cackling laughter. This is raw, sick material, and has tinges of real, non-contrived madness to it, though the noise is straight-ahead and calmly assured. I can't get it out of my head: the laughter, the infernal **LAUGHTER**! Good single overall, made great by the power of **BSTRDS!!!**

HONED BASTION / SISPRUM VISH
Split 7-inch
Seizure Palace/Portland Bad Date Line

Can't say I've heard much from either of these project pseudonyms (Honed Bastion = Dead/Bird; Sisprum Vish = Glamorous Pat), but was pleasantly surprised by both. Honed Bastion is just listed as synth, but I heard so much more: dockside fog ambience, slow, clanking murk (ghosts on the dock), a location heavy with solitude. Disruptive edits are peppered throughout the side, mostly to let the listener know that there's someone steering the ship. Track two is more destructive, an ascending surge, something big and heavy rolling backwards up the hill with a trail of rainbow chords behind. Track three is like far-off chimes which are sped up while gunshot reports ring from the other side of a hill. The side ends with a handful of Dada junk, and leaves a pleasant taste in the mouth.

Vish side starts with four lock grooves, shrill but agreeably symmetrical. Perfect for radio shows and/or deprogramming parties! The track itself is rougher but also completely gibbering and crazy, like Wagstaff starring in a no-budget horror movie. Loads of evocative moments throughout, all of them happening in surprising fidelities. Sisprum Vish combines the best aspects of non-jokey UK goonery (is it any wonder that Glam Pat's had a release on Chocolate Monk?) and stonerville Midwest muck-fi. A completely enjoyable 7-inch with a beautiful package, with screenprinted art both inside and out (and yes, it's a pocket sleeve with printing inside. Grab your flashlight!).

HUM OF THE DRUID
Hum of the Druid cs
Abisko / Abisko 14

Eric Stonefelt's Hum Of The Druid is one of the most exciting sound projects operating today. There's such a refreshing completeness to the execution that it's surprising more people don't obsess over it the way they do other less worthy endeavors. It isn't Noise, Drone, Industrial, or Ambient. It can be very noisy, atmospheric and droningly industrial, but it's more than all of those. It's purely Hum Of The Druid, darkly surreal philosophical environments. If you listen closely, it's obvious he's not creating stuff to sell: merch, product, status through proliferation. He's creating worlds, recordings you actually want to listen to more than once.

This tape gives the audience four tracks, two to a side. The first, 'Fused to Foci,' is an ultra-heavy and dense crumbling rock world. Like you're hiding in a tight space as massive events take place, things beyond your control. It doesn't just go for the easy approach of blasting the audience the whole time; the contrast is adjusted, and you can peek out of your prison, pick up on environmental details, things that clarify the space, force you to look deeper, entice you to venture out. And when you finally do, everything falls away, the landslide was an illusion, and you're bathed in iridescence. The peace only lasts for a moment as more rubble smashes in, this time the crumbling is pulled back where details are clearer. Material chunks slide, fall, and tear open, textures are scrutinized. Dusty voices and reflective feedback shards mix in. It's all so thick that reality and paranoiac interpretation share the same field. 'Scaffold's Width' is an easier situation. Stones are still tumbling, but there's space. It's a cavernous setting with wooden creaking and metallic tones hanging low. Chains and antiquated mechanisms drift at the corner of perception. Rough patches edge in and out of the field allowing for more relaxed exploration. The calmer moments are really impressive, Stonefelt's confidence in his materials is clear, and his restraint is telling in that he knows when to let the tones and textures speak and when to control them.

Distant charges rumble at the start of 'Manufacturing of Personal Symbols' only for the shot to focus in on harsh structures similar from the A side, but with the dead clockwork closer to the fore along with delicate feedback tones just behind the rumbles. Eventually some decrepit vocals come in, carried aloft by bird skeleton feedback. No lyrics or clarity, just an organism. Some softer crumbling is mixed among the ultra-heavy rumbles, like chewing on dirt, or pushing around some bricks. As these elements are all gradually brought together, it hits a grimy climax. The final piece, 'Vitreous Strands,' begins with more heavy textures, but derived from some sort of palpable material movement. A gentle droning tonality rises in the background, the faded memory of a conveyor belt. Eventually growing to a muted shimmer graced with beautiful fluttering textures spreading dust from tired wings. Flecks of feedback suggesting a dove, and the memory fades, to be replaced by more crumbling and torn spaces, but there is a weariness to the textures at this time, they saturate the space and eventually a human voice yells out. It's not clear what is said, but after this obscured declaration, a heavy drone moves in as the noisier textures recede, more human utterances and feedback mixed into the textures. Everything is pushed into a stuttering overload and the peaks of a screaming voice can be heard. This is an incredibly powerful and effective statement; eventually, all that's left is a ghostly melodic vocal line, a staggering conclusion.

Along with the obviously exemplary sonics, Stonefelt's visual art is one of the great aspects of the project. Not since Christoph Heeman's drawings for the original Ultra LPs have there been such delightfully detailed and creepy cover images. They're like a root-infested half dream of those old Stephen Gammell drawings for the 'Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark' covers. It needs to be mentioned that Abisko stands as a gold standard for cassette culture, this tape has been produced in a hand numbered edition of 200 copies. Basically, this is brilliant material that the label believes in and furthermore wants you to hear. Support art and rationality and get this incredible album. - Nick Henry

HUM OF THE DRUID / FIRE IN THE HEAD
Split LP
Cipher Productions/Audio Immolation Industries / (sic 36)/[A/I/I/07]

A split LP pairing the long-underestimated project Hum of the Druid with recently-dissolved Power Electronics unit Fire in the Head. The **HOTD** side ('A Swirling Carnival for Every Species') promises 'all sounds of an analog/acoustic nature,' as if it needed to be said — you can practically feel the dry twigs cracking under your boots on every second of this side. Crumbling, fully physical sounds emanate from every inch of this side, with distortion sounding more like a boost in the gain on the mixer than a chain of pedals. The side is all crunching, rustling, clanking physicality, with windy harmonics passing through the spaces in between; think of it as Gigantic Cruel Party, if you like. The sounds, including the occasional ambient passages, don't really take you to an abstracted 'soundscape' so much as document a person running his hands through a tub of branches, rusty pipes, and recycling, but that's no criticism. Your focus while listening is on the motion, the tactile feeling of the objects being broken and disrupted, and you're never really taken out of the moment — it's not like Kapotte Muziek, where all of the rubbing, scraping, and abrading magically turns into a surreal landscape. Occasional whining sounds, possibly from bowed cymbals, contrast the earthy crunch of the primary noise. Heady stuff, the diametric opposite of much of what's accepted as capital-N Noise today, in all the best ways.

Since each side of this split record has its own distinct artwork (and they're arranged so that you can decide who gets to be the A and the B when shelving it), the first thing you might be tempted to ask Fire in the Head is how he managed to get fucking Nick Blinko to do his cover art. After the initial Peni-inspired shock wears off, though, you can settle down and enjoy his side, which is titled 'The Coming Silence,' a fittingly bitter title for this now-defunct project. The opening sample summarizes the project's militaristic/moralistic worldview

as well as anything: 'I service the machinery of death. If that makes me evil, so be it.' After a long, slow intro with Arabian devotional music samples interlaced, the side offers up Power Electronics with lyrics discussing multiple aspects of sides-based religious hate. We're not talking about the all-religion-is-hate perspective of a project like **CON-DOM**, but rather a specific look at the individual opposition forces: Jew vs. Islam, Christian vs. Islam, Protestant vs. Catholic, looking specifically at the war, not the bloodlust at its core. Often more detailed and atmospheric than monolithically rage-filled, **FITH** attempts to create genuine reactions, not just blind anger.

The track 'Gag Order' contains a slow-moving Industrial pound before finally getting all ghastly-throated in the final two minutes. When Mike Page finally explodes after many minutes of intentional restraint, the effect is all the more startling for it, but by this time, the opportunity to do serious damage has long passed.

In the beginning, Power Electronics favored sex and Nazis (and sex with Nazis). Then, US projects tried to include other lyrical themes, but kept the yelling and monolithic textures. Here, Page has tamped down the anger, keeping it at a continual boil, creating something new, something more like 'Seething Electronics.'

IRM
'Indications of Nigredo' 12-inch
Segerhuva / seger 23

'Nigredo: 1.) Alchemical term: putrefication of decomposition, the 'uniform black substance' all things must be reduced/cooked/cleansed into on the pathway to the philosopher's stone. 2.) Psychological term, per Carl Jung: A moment of maximum despair that is a prerequisite to personal development. Adapted from the alchemical term as well.'

Cut at 45 RPM on clean-sounding vinyl for maximum impact, this compositionally sound example of voyeuristic medical surrealism unfolds slowly and mysteriously, but with superb continuity. The cover, for example, is a glossy color-print job, but is designed to look like a piece of type-written paper has been glued onto the jacket, with a Polaroid of a distressing photo of a man's disfigured crotch 'affixed' below. Looking at the catalog, it'd be easy to mistake this for a home-glued 'one lost weekend' homemade job, but it's not. As the first scraped notes of the effected bass guitar (which resembles piano interiors at first) are overlaid with deeper and more resonant waves of nasty electronics, the interrogation begins. 'Which indicators...are you looking for?' barks the doctor/warden. You want to ask your own questions, but he is asking you even more baffling questions, reading off a litany of 'indications,' including 'question mark for nose,' 'hands with no fingers,' 'teeth exaggerated,' and, finally, 'Clown instead of person.' (This last one is repeated again and again in the vocals, building to hysteria at the end.) Someone has placed pencil 'X' marks beside the indications they have chosen, but they are not the indications you would have chosen. You want to give the checklist back...it's already been used, I'd like a fresh one. Instead, the screaming gets more insistent. 'WHICH INDICATIONS... ARE YOU LOOKING FOR???' The listener is pulled very forcefully into this maelstrom of tightly-wound interrogation/medical analysis, as the sounds (the vocalist seems to be addressing you specifically, more so than in most scattershot PE approaches, where the eye-line doesn't project directly into the camera) and sights (confusing, pro-printed but heavily 'marked' artwork, which manages to reproduce the feeling of a home-made, ramshackle LP) merge into the feeling like you are required to provide an answer, and the correct one at that, without quite understanding the question.

Side Two continues with more 'indications,' reading them out in calm, medicinal tones in the background, while the menace increases. Bass attacks, frightening yells, and an aura of the type of mental breakdown that comes just before transformation makes this a harrowing document of breathtaking craft. Head and shoulders above the rest, brilliance squared, true psychological agony/ecstacy.

IDEA FIRE COMPANY
The Island of Taste LP
Swill Radio / Swill 026

For reasons too complicated to understand without a degree in advanced trend-spotting, Amherst, Massachusetts' Idea Fire Company manages to be more shunned by the public at large with each new album, even as they ascend to the zenith of their powers. Ever since their third album (*Anti-Natural*), the band has pared back its arsenal drastically, excising all items ('tribal' rhythms, taped samples) not immediately necessary to the vision. As a result, *Anti-Natural* shines its austere synth tones through a prism of flickering memories, illuminating a terrain of extreme loneliness and hallucinatory despair. *Stranded* (their fourth) upped the equation, adding two more members and a host of shockingly new devices, including three-part female harmony singing, Wagner loops, and some mighty ballsy radio-fiddling.

Now comes *The Island of Taste*, a natural conclusion to **IFCO**'s modern triptych of records. Not quite the radical stylistic jump that *Stranded* was from *Anti-Natural* (or especially the jump that *Anti-Natural* was from *The Fourth Dimension is Money*), *Taste* synthesizes lessons learned from the Shadow Ring, from TART, and from the previous **IFCO** records, picking up guest members at will, paring down to the core duo of Scott Foust and Karla Borecky when necessary, and using the oft-touted editing and selection process to create a feeling of curatorial perfection. Not a second of this record feels left to chance, and it's unlikely that anyone ever said 'eh, close enough' before shipping the masters off to the plant.

First, the package. It straight up cannot be beat by anything currently on the market — especially not for the price ($16 and shipping). A sumptuous full-color sleeve, depicting an oil painting of the 'Island of Taste' itself (by Borecky herself), heavy vinyl with nary a crackle or pop to be heard on either side (nice job, RTI!), and a printed envelope containing six two-sided art cards which include band pics, track titles, and a long, inspiring essay by Foust about the vital need to chisel all bullshit out of your life and art. The titles suggest a vague concept, in which the protagonist reaches the Island of Taste through the course of the record. I'm reminded of *Taking Tiger Mountain* (by Strategy): as the concept of the album gets foggier, the participants seemingly 'overcome' Tiger Mountain by doing everything except scaling it (or even acknowledging it). Three cheers for strategy!

The opening track ('Land Ho') finds the Hero pacing across the deck of a ship, classical music crackling out of a portable transistor, industrial humming in the distance. Then: CLANG! A tuning fork hits, again and again, perhaps calibrating the Island's machinations unsuccessfully against Western musical conventions. Borecky's piano plays a part in nearly every track on the album. Rigorously simple, it starts out nostalgic before being hammered into Ligeti oblivion, just another sound source. Foust, meanwhile, tunes his shortwave radio with all the frequencies of the daylight, diagonal tonalities perfectly placed, controlled in ways that would seem unlikely or impossible for something that's not a pitched instrument (or an instrument at all, technically).

'Heroes of the Last Barricade' is a bona-fide hit, with the three-part female harmonies first exposed on *Stranded* being further refined into modern-day call of the wild, joined by squeaky contributions from Richard Rupenus (oh, didn't I mention The New Blockaders contribution? That's what you call burying the lead), and an overall feeling of heavy weather. It all works — Gesualdo's chamber works mixed with *Rashomon*'s rainstorm, the modern impulse to create new life within the tool shed; the classical Greek chorus moans its approval...

The magic ingredients here all involve time. Time needed to re-try a song until it is absolutely precisely the way you want it — no regrets down the line for not giving it another go. Time to edit out all the weakness — one can only imagine how many whole albums could be cut together with the probable outtakes (answer: none. This is the only album). Time to really steep yourself in your own works — if you finish an album as fast as you can, hoping never to have to listen to it again, always 'looking forward to the next record,' you should be aware that the buyer will someday do the same. As 'Last Man...Last Round...' trudges its way to the deepest, most obscure interior lands of The Island of Taste, we have to ask ourselves where to go from here. I suggest back around to the other side again.

IDEA FIRE COMPANY
Vital: Live in Europe CD
Swill Radio / Swill 025

IFCO took a short jaunt to Europe back in 2007, jettisoning the 'youth' portion of the band (Jessi and Meara perhaps having to study for their finals?) and augmenting the core duo (Scott Foust and Karla Borecky) with Frans de Waard of Kapotte Muziek. With a minimal setup (keyboard, shortwave, echo box, tapes, and 'a sawed-off MS-20'), the trio played gigs in Rotterdam, Bremen, and Hasselt. This CD highlights these shows.

The opening tracks from Rotterdam, presumably from the start of the tour, capture all the facets of first night jitters and their eventual resolution. It's not quite clicking yet for the opener, 'Pleasure Cruise,' as the syncopated piano chords stumble a bit and the MS-20 searches for tones other than the standard analogue rise/fall. About halfway through the track, you can hear the band coming together, the nerves go away, and the track lands at a fairly exciting conclusion. Working out the kinks, the band whips out their signature tune, the well-documented and endlessly malleable 'Cycle 19' (it being the subject of an entire cassette on the long-gone Polyamory label...versions also turn up on the *Anti-Natural* LP and the *Rags to Riches* cassette).

Track three ('Hanging') is the real check-casher. A distinctly 'dark corners of a government building in Eastern Europe' atmosphere is evoked — footsteps pounding down the halls, unintelligible voices on old radios, nauseous, non-musical synth, TV static; paranoia abounds. As the track winds on, the narrow hallways and flickering lightbulbs open into an outdoor path, and we soon find ourselves trading tile flooring for underbrush in that other great playground of paranoia, the deep woods. Radio waves transform into birdcalls, tape hiss into the roar of a far-off waterfall. The track is symmetrical, though, and soon the forest reverts to the mysterious office complex again, with a creepy number-station song winding things down. A sublime centerpiece.

The last two tracks come from later shows in Bremen and Hasselt, and are far more assured, with 'Pour HG' again using its glacial timbres as a burial ground for all manner of frightening homing-beacon wails. By the time the group concludes with another take on 'Pleasure Cruise,' the song has become fully realized, the plonky piano replaced by a pulsing synth, while the shortwave sweeps and synth washes finally gel into something much heavier.

Evaluating an **IFCO** live album is tricky. While the band is obviously adept at creating a version of their sound for the live stage, it's still a long way from here back to *The Island of Taste*, or other precisely-rendered studio releases. Still, **IFCO** LPs might be a little alienating to casual fans of challenging music (*Anti-Natural*, I'm looking in your direction), which is why *Vital* could work as a stepping stone for folks with a more casual interest in the band.

ILLUSION OF SAFETY
Sedition & Quell 10-inch
Crippled Intellect Productions / C.I.P. 21

After a 8-year silence (2003's *Time Remaining* looks like the final transmission until 2008), Dan Burke's 25 year-old project Illusion of Safety is back on the payroll, with four new releases in 2008. The most colorful of these surely must be this yellow-vinyl 10-inch on the C.I.P. label of Chicago. The full-color matte-finish cover displays what looks like art installation pieces, sculptures or dolls next to assorted written aphorisms, perhaps tying the abstract music to an installation context. Side One's 'Sedition' is indeed sedate, with large scrolls of deep and reverberated tone unrolling over the landscape with the randomness of tumbleweeds, while whines and quiet chirps dot the far edges of the background, evoking a surrealist terrain, a jungle rich with detail but largely uninhabited.

Side Two's 'Quell' starts with a voice asking 'What's wrong?' before digitally-driven sounds like rotor blades and electric razors disrupt the electric current in your listening room. This side contains all manner of claustrophobic industrial evocations, often suggesting the soundtrack to a film about surveillance helicopters. Burke's great strength here is making the environment, wherever and whenever you're listening, feel like 2 a.m. behind a windshield of a moving vehicle, driving or flying over a technologically-choked urban terrain, alone but omnipotent.

There's a certain era of experimental/Industrial sound artists whose specialty seems to be evoking the security-breach espionage paranoia films of the middle 1980s, films in which supercomputers churn out data maniacally while airtight and pilotless attack planes carry off irretrievable missions, diodes humming and LED monitors chattering with uninterrupted data; high-tech computer spying circa 1986, re-configured for a Patriot Act era. (Schloss Tegal and John Duncan also have/had a talent for this type of slate-gray military/industrial bunker ambience. Shortwave radio always seemed to play some part.) It's a shame that this vibe is slowly evaporating from modern electronics — I see precious few of the younger generation mining this fertile field, even as our lives seem more and more encroached by machines and our leaders exhibit bigger and bigger hardons for surveillance machinery. Perhaps the next generation just isn't quite as freaked out by the notion of computer/machine encroachment in all aspects of our lives. Or perhaps it just hits too close to home these days.

Jazzfinger. Photo by Lee Etherington

IRGUN Z'WAI LEUMI
Klirrfaktor LP
Verlautbarung / Mitteilung 45

In the lineage that includes Mauthausen Orchestra, Atrax Morgue, Alfarmania, Zone Nord, Super 8 Loop, Blood of Thee Christ, Vårtgård, and many others before and after, this seldom-heard Death Industrial side project of Proiekt Hat finally gets the LP treatment, allowing more than the usual small handful of fanatics to hear what's cooking in Sweden.

This is LP is no more, and no less, than wave after wave of nasty crud, a cassette-quality recording in LP fidelity. Squeaking, tremolo-heavy grunts of strange feedback, dark pools of undulating murkiness run through with low-end bursts, pops, and an occasional opening into a gaping maw filled lined with dirt and sharp iron filings. The high-end tweetings are the epitome of the synth-as-rusty-hinge sound, and the constant low-end rattling commands attention, the track undulating like sounds heard through the beating of an oscillating fan. The sound is simple and repetitive, but like watching the tides roll in, you can be fascinated for hours with minimal variation. Chains of delay pedal-conjured ghosts break free and float upwards while the whining of factory gears squeal and shudder, a rich tapestry of gray and charcoal, with slow, deliberate changes occurring rarely. There's no mystery here, no prize at the center, just the unalloyed ecstasy of fuzz, hiss, filthy static, and grimy magic played with greasy fingers. If you need a point of reference, Vårtgård's *Rått* cassette on Gothenburg Blood Cult creates similar ear-damage out of equally vile ingredients.

Side Two ('True West,' a contrast from Side One, which is titled 'Magnetic West') is more event-based, without the constant idling-motor sound that ran throughout the first side. Each delay / reverb-generated event stabs against a blank canvas; bursts of activity, dreamlike howls, abstract avalanches, boulders falling erratically, constantly on the brink of tumbling over the cliff, but always with restraint. The power of this record comes not from a host of new tones or frequencies, but from rigorously breaking apart the entire post-mortem genre into its component parts, perfecting each element in a new sequence. This record was made by someone who loves filth, is an expert at reproducing filth, for the enjoyment of filth-lovers (286 of them, to be precise). Just as the HNW disciples attempt to atomize the mid-'90s harsh noise cassette culture (from Chop Shop to OVMN to Skin Crime) and amplify its component particles, so Irgun Z'wai Leumi (and Vårtgård and Alfarmania and others now working) seem to be doing post-graduate work at the Atrax Morgue/Zone Nord/Blood ov Thee Christ school of post-mortem.

JAZZFINGER
'Prayer Wheel/Soar' 7-inch
Short Forest / acre002

Jazzfinger's performance at the 2009 No Fun Festival was a bit of a disappointment for me — three people sitting in front of feeding back amplifiers making minor adjustments captured little of the essential Jazzfinger environment, the badly-damaged fidelity and ramshackle collection of instruments existing to split the difference between Ashtray Navigation's bottomed-out psychedelia and the Sun City Girl's homemade exotica. Fortunately, this concise little single gets it right.

Both 'Prayer Wheel' and 'Soar' come off like alternate-universe recordings of 19th century Indian classical music, the former featuring wheezy pump organ and sliding, rubber-band guitar, the latter trading the guitar for a flute, playing the changes over three chords from the organ. It's the type of austere exploration that could go on forever and ever; once you've found the component elements, they can be re-arranged endlessly. Sadly, it's only a single, and is over far too quickly.

GX JUPITTER-LARSEN
'Crickets in the Hollywood Subway/Tasmanian Devil About the Polywave' 7-inch
Little Enjoyer / le08

A lovely little art object, and a cross-continental handshake between L.A. (GX) and N.Y.C. (Little Enjoyer). Side One of this white vinyl 7-inch contains exactly what the title promises, crickets and subway sounds. There are some suggestions of editing, but maybe not — this might just be pure field recording. It's funny, sweet, and short. Side Two has a more Industrial feel about it, although there is indeed a Tasmanian Devil in the mix (that, or some other horrific creature born to sing the Germs songbook). Short. Damn short. Perfect. Damned perfect. Like I say, an art object — austere letterpress cover, white vinyl, simple design, no 'dude'-ness to be found within — but an art object that will bring a smile to your ears and eyes.

GX JUPITTER-LARSEN
Cinema Noise DVD
Troniks / TRO-285

Everyone in this scene calls themselves 'obsessed' and everyone thinks they love the sounds of destruction, but nobody, and I mean NOBODY, is truly obsessed with the sounds of destruction (and destruction itself) like GX Jupitter-Larsen is. Listen: how many times this week did you think about smashing something? Over a co-workers head, maybe, or against a douchebag's yuppie-mobile? Maybe against some part of your body? Fine. But, did you give a moment's though to destroying the beach? Or a film? Or fabric? Or your precious LP collection? GX has made entropy both sexy and scientific as he methodically destroys objects while applying Cage-level intellectual rigor to create beautiful structures around deliberate erosion, breaking, and entropy. You probably never thought about it long enough to think of how you even WOULD destroy the beach... shoveling makes sense, but really, aren't you just moving the beach around? At first blush, 'counting grains of sand,' a popular GX pastime, seems anti-entropic. Aren't you ordering things, rather than disordering them? Not at all...counting grains of sand atomizes the beach! It's not a beach now, it's 7 x 10345 individual grains of sand. You might make a hole in a wall as a dramatic gesture, or a release of frustration, but are you willing to put 977 holes in pieces of paper with a paper-punch in the name of entropy? Is fire really just useful to annihilate your enemies and/or your financial mistakes? You hate collector culture, but would you be willing to staple all your records together with a staple-gun? What's it worth to you? How far are you willing to go? How long before you get bored and walk away, or start to protect the things that are precious to you, that define you?

As this DVD proves over and over, everything is entropy, and entropy is EVERYTHING to GX. It's not just dramatic gestures, smashing furniture or bashing a piece of metal (those are good too), but even small things, like eroding the tip of a funnel with sandpaper. FOR AN HOUR. Of course, nothing says that small gestures have to be quiet gestures; that's why GX may destroy the world one piece at a time, but you can damn well bet that the amplifiers will be the last things to go!

***Cinema Noise* is a compilation of GX's visual excursions into entropy. These films have been submitted to film festivals through the years, but seldom seen in other venues. While some are narrative-driven (sort of), others simply document new and inventive ways to break shit. Here's what you get:**

'A Film By...': The hand of GX is cutting film as it spools out of a film projector. The old-style, single static-shot actually reminds me a bit of Len Cella's *Moron Movies*! Sound comes as morse-code beeps and something that sounds like maybe amplified scissors cutting. Quite funny! Not showing the top reel stretches our sense of time — without being able to see how much film has yet to unspool, we can't determine how much time is left in the film (we assumes that the piece ends when the feed reel is empty). Strangely, the film ends before the film does, if you catch my drift.

'Frequency': A narrative film from 1992, with the sounds of the Clici-Clic (GX's name for his amplified hole-punch) as a soundtrack. Two people walk through the snow. Each person is wearing one ski and one street shoe. One carries a large shovel, and one a smaller hoe. We don't see their faces. There is at least five minutes of walking. The clici-clic sound could almost be some very lo-fi post-punk recording, so rhythmic is the oscillating feedback sound, interspersed with the actual sounds of clicking hole-punch, itself sounding like a chattering drummer. Only the person with the large shovel is seen digging — no sign of the person with the hoe. Next, a humorous shot of an outstretched arm, with a second one holding a magnifying glass close, is moving dirt around, apparently, as the text says, to 'count the grains' from the dirt that used to be where a hole now is.

'Counting the Sand': A ragged, rhythmic voice cut-up reads some of Larsen's concepts (phrases like 'Transexpansion numeral units') while a hand holds a small mound of sand. The index finger of the other hand separates grains meticulously, 'counting' them. Multiple grain-counting excursions occurring in different places are superimposed (the text mentions three 'boys' are doing the counting, though at least one hand is wearing a wedding ring). Long freeze-frames occur. Briefly, another approach is shown at the end, as an index finger strokes a small hole in the beach, a very miniaturized view of hole-making.

'Facts on the Polywave': Starts with an arty shot of a drill-bit spinning, acting as "opening credits." Black and white footage of a road. Then, we are driving down the road, the camera shooting telephoto out the side window, creating flat, constant, fast movement. Sound is very dirty and rough, the most 'Noise' sounding piece so far — it brings to mind the much-mythologized 1992 of your dreams. Interspersed shots of the freeze-frame picture of the road with high-speed images, seemingly of the rock face as it goes by. Shots of a smoking drill, drilling into a sheet of metal or concrete or something. Breath visible from the person doing the drilling, so maybe it's just cold in there. Soon, a door is drilled, repeatedly. It looks like fun, just like popping bubble wrap! From here, back to a motorcycle riding, a loop of the same shot over and over. Only at minute 19 do loops of talking begin, the words of the 'nomadic bikers' who 'debate thought probabilities.' As usual, meaning is eluded, seductively. Freeze frame of hands on bike handlebars that goes to motion shots of bikers' hands on handle bars, but the hands are gesturing. The longest, and also probably the most satisfying so far.

'Zero Plus Zero': I'll have to defer to the description here: 'A spy is led to have an irrational vision after reading a series of notes regarding lost cosmonauts.' Hmmm, I see. A man in a suit and a fedora walks the streets, pulling secret 'cargo' out of holes in walls, looking at a picture in his pocket (a still shot of some cosmonauts is superimposed) as he walks the Noir-ish streets. Along with several stationary shots of dirt and fences, usually taken from a jaunty angle, the man starts — you guessed it — digging a hole in the ground. This is the most 'Movie'-like movie we've seen so far, with a good gumshoe feel and underground film production values. The sound is oscillator loops with a desolate sci-fi atmosphere (think 'Forbidden Planet'). More 'musical' than many of the scores so far. And, uh, hooray, because the spy's 'irrational vision' is two women kissing each other while egg yolks are dropped on them from above.

'Holes on the Neck': At last, lesbian vampire garlic farmers! This DVD gets better and better. One female figure is tying up another...sometimes the victim has a nightgown on, sometimes she is nude. A cat watches and sometimes chews on the rope end. Arty closeup shots of faces, shoulders, and yes, holes on the neck. From here, shots of a woman hoeing the ground, presumably a garlic patch. The clici-clic soundtrack here is much different than the one prior...more flanged, more psychedelic... dubwise, even! Three lesbian vampires watch together while a fourth dances nude for them, and then they come up to frolic with her. It is definitely erotically-charged, but also fun and campy and sweet...everybody appears to be having a really great time. The contrived acting is not a million miles from Guy Maddin's style (and he's no stranger to barely-veiled eroticism either!). After showing off some garlic, there's another roomful of clothed and nude lesbian vampires (and maybe humans?). Eggs are again broken over the head of one of them, like a preparation of some sort, while another vampire watches it all from in front of a fireplace. Ends with garlic harvesting. Hard to tell if this was 'good' compared with the others, because it's just so damned enjoyable!

'Change in the Weather': Nice 'amplified erosion' track (I'm imagining something being dragged on a spinning wheel of sandpaper) while, after three minutes of static shots of rafters, we see a woman walk up to a crouching man in a dressed in a bear costume, standing in an attic. Nearby, two people in Haters-style wrestling masks (one wearing a pith helmet, both wearing safari gear) are counting sand in a box and writing it down. Meanwhile, the man in the bear costume tinkers with a device that he is building. The description suggests that 'the number of grains of sand is the number needed to make the machine work.' I get lost on crucial elements of the plot, probably because at this point, I'm still thinking about the lesbian vampires.

'In a Blink': A short, sweet little film in which we see a teapot, washed up on a beach. The camera zooms in on the teapot. Then, using a small, circular aperture, the camera gives the impression of looking inside the teapot, where we see a woman, curled up on her side, making little rips in a big piece of fabric, very methodically.

'Paris, April 2002': A 35 minute film of a radio performance of 'Dirwyn,' the piece involving erosion of a calculator against a rotating fan. A solid 20 minutes of the airtime is given over to unbroken shots of the trip to and from the radio station, the camera lens held straight up, at the roof of the subway, capturing peripheral action through the windows, occasional passengers walking by, punctuated by the 'bing!' sounds that indicate the next station. The perspective (the camera looking straight up, even when in motion) gives the viewer the feeling of observing from the position of a hospital stretcher. The performance itself is shot very close, just hands holding a (already quite-eroded) calculator on the center-point of a small, plastic fan. As the fan is hardly strong enough to resist a hard plastic item, the blades don't come into play until nearly the end, at which point the calculator stops them cold, ending the piece. The sound is agreeably dense, full of reverb and riding on a tide of micro-details in angle grinding, inexplicably changing the sound of the piece drastically with each micro-meter adjustment. Again, the last 10 minutes or so are the subway back to the hotel, again with the camera facing straight up.

'Straslund 2005': Described by the literature as 'A comparison of the contrasting iconographies of digging and lighting,' and that's no joke! Alternating footage of a naked man, frenziedly by stylishly boring a smooth, deep hole in the sand, contrasted with shots of streetlamps lit at night, shot straight up again to appear like circular discs of light. The audio ends with a ragged explosion. A fine conclusion!

This is a great, long DVD...maybe a bit too much to take in all at once, but easily digestible a few films at a time. As films like this and Jupitter-Larsen's booklet '34 Essays' (as well as his extensive web site, www.jupitter-larsen.com) are made more accessible to fans and interested parties, the seemingly arcane and sometimes head-scratching theories can be viewed in more practical, visually stimulating ways. A must for the discriminating entropist in your life.

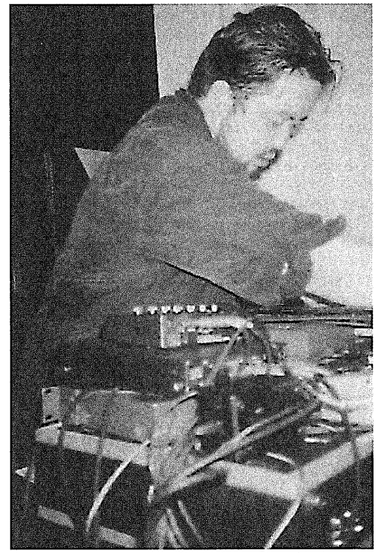
K2 / PUTREFIER
Split LP
Gods of Tundra / GOTK2P

Sweet sassafras, what a pairing! Obviously, rumors of K2's death (in the realms of noise creation, anyway) were greatly exaggerated. Or maybe this is just old news being pressed up on fresh newsprint. Regardless, it's cause for nipple tweaking through tight t-shirts everywhere. Or is it?

Each side contains source material and re-working from each of the primaries, so it's a collab and not a split, but it's a weighted one, in that it's pretty obvious who had the last word on each side. '20 hz and Rising' is Putrefier's domain — fetchingly abrasive and speedy, but, perhaps thanks for K2's influence, not too fussy or beepy. Mark Durgan works the multiple layers here without getting cluttered or indistinct — it's the power of his CONSTRUCTIONS that is his major strength. Another indicator that this is Durgan's showcase is the weird inner calm amidst the side — for all its speed and multi-dimensionality, the abrasion and clattering and flying cookware all has a calmness in the center of it. The side also dips frequently into a realm of electro-acoustic gentility that is all Durgan. That said, the guy never dwells fully in high- or low-brow domains, mixing the two seamlessly, dragging Art along to a needle party and kicking Scumbag into a roomful of wine & cheese fanciers.

After you've adjusted to the smooth-running engine on Side One, flip the platter and prepare your ass for the nitro-burning 'nad smasher on Side Two! Kusafuka nearly doubles the volume on 'Trebling,' pushing off the dock with a slew of yarking declamations from his distorto-mic. Kusafuka does a fine job of chopping up Durgan and his toolbox — bits of modern Putrefier jut out of the morass, but are pushed quickly back in, until the centrifugal force spins the lazers and loops back out to the surface, like the heavy elements pressed against the walls of a cyclotron. The side ends with a full-on Japanoise Classic Blast with some sick left-right jumping. No words I can spill will properly delineate that damp feeling you'll have in your shorts after this one.

Whether you can map out exactly who did what to whom or not is irrelevant to the enjoyment of this record, which is thoroughly bracing and virtuosic, dripping with texture and more than up to the task of sustaining obsession through repeated plays. (50 lucky stooges snaked a limited-edition boxed version of this that came with two cassettes, one of them a reissue of the K2 CDr from 1999 on American Tapes.)


K2. Photo by Steve Underwood

KILT
Snow White In Hell LP
Anarchymoon/sicksicksick/Bastardised / anok16/sssk-022/#17

KILT is a noisy power trio of the south/western United States, featuring Bob Bellerue (Redglaer, Halfnormal), Raven Chacon (Cobra//Group, Dog Shit Taco, as well as his own name as a chamber/classical composer) and Sandor Finta (Democri$y). Starting in Power Electronics mode, with ultra-distorted bullhorn vox mixing with shards of flinty digital ache, the record feels like we're just in a holding pattern before the dam bursts. As the side goes on, though, the forces continue to gather outside the city walls, but no call to war is ever uttered. It is soon apparent that this album is less about straight noise destruction, and more about a thunderous take on free improvisation (a la AMM, Spontaneous Music Ensemble, and Morphogenesis). It's noisy, yes, but not strictly noise — there's a lot of narrative buried in these grooves.

Considering the three distinct personalities contributing, the results are spacious and uncluttered, and individual gestures project from the melee constantly. *Snow White In Hell* is loud, it's forceful, but it's not especially punishing — it deliberately steps back every time an opportunity to score a hammer-to-the-skull death blow. This is not a criticism, though. This record is not a wall, but a river, a river which contains a constant supply of dead things floating in the muck for you to pull out, turn over in your hands, and toss back. As a forthright statement of forceful wishes, it's a very satisfying, moment-driven as opposed to a cascade of unchanging harshness. However, considering the group's wish to be evil and harsh, though, it might almost be too subtle for its own good.

The record is pressed on randomly-colored vinyl (mine was gray and marbly, yours might be pink or brown or puke) and has an outstanding silkscreen cover (silver ink on front, gold on back, monster faces for all).

KOEFF
Liminal Looks 3-inch CD
Unrest Productions / UNPRCD04

The first time I heard Johanna Rosenqvist's Koeff project was on Segerhuva's defining compilation *Sweetness Will Overcome*. I was deeply impressed with the subtlety and individuality of her contribution. Here, Unrest Productions gives us a beautifully composed set of industrial song forms and atmospherics. There is very little information present on this release to confirm, deny or clarify my impressions, but knowing the little bit I do about her works, I feel that this is a type of subversive household industrial, an exploration of the unexpected cruelty and power that potentially lies in even the most mundane objects and experiences.

The first track, 'Within,' is a decayed series of slightly melodic phrases starting out sounding like guitar feedback tonality; of course, there's no way to be sure — it could be a vacuum cleaner and a hair brush. It eventually moves into a section sounding like a humming human voice. The soothing nature of this track is a place setting and introduction; we're made to feel comfortable/lethargic. That state is what makes the following track so unexpected. 'Inspecting It Further' is a straight up rhythm-based song piece, true old-school Industrial, with synth beams and detached vocals. The next track, 'Transgressor,' is another rhythmic dance-floor in a bunker piece; it's much more frantic than the last, with layers of static on top of the jacked rhythms. The vocals sound like Rosenqvist's singing in a dust storm, which gives an excellent dynamic to the environment. There are also whispered vocals floating around, altogether a great atmosphere, clearly and carefully considered. The last track disposes of solid rhythms, leaving only lo-fi machine noise and a spoken monologue about tape recorders. It's a well done closer, which along with the opening track bookends the two song forms nicely.

Sadly, this release hits one of my pet peeves by not including any lyrics. This is unfortunate, because I get annoyed hearing a voice and wanting to know what is being communicated. Besides that gripe, this is a succinct and addictive disc, a perfect dose of rhythmic old-school Industrial done right, no tacky fun. Fans of later Haus Arafna and Maria Zerfall will definitely want to investigate. (Nick Henry)

GRAHAM LAMBKIN
Salmon Run CD
Kye / KYE 02

Lambkin's prior solo outing, the LP *Poem (for Voice and Tape)*, is an unsettling landscape with few recognizable landmarks. A voice slowed beyond comprehension, accompanied mostly by the sounds of rain and sculpted with minimal editing, and that's about it. You can feel your jaw clench as the tension-filled sides unfold, waiting for transitions that never arrive and no real resolutions. This slow, somber atmosphere later carried over into the devastating final document by the Shadow Ring, 2005's *I'm Some Songs*.

This new CD uses a larger variety of sound sources (manipulated voice(s), static, classical music, judicious editing, 'sound poetry'-styled performance and even more editing) to create a lusher and more pungent bouquet. The frequent use of untreated classical music (contemporary but not squeaky-squawky, more Arvo Pärt than György Ligeti) is the real wild card here. Sonically, the low-key confusion suggests the collage tracks on the first TART album, tracks like 'The Rabbits of Mangtarau' and 'Woman in Her Womb,' while the vocal techniques, unsurprisingly, recall the first Elklink tape on Polyamory (gagging, lip-smacking, whispering, popping 'p's as an artistic filigree).

The editing, however, is the real star here. Tapes devolve into crackles that sound like you've got a short in your stereo before snapping back into crystal-clear precision. Moments of sedate musicality are inharmoniously bisected by far-off tapes of people laughing in kitchens, as the mood circles between uneasy calm and total paranoia. Everything about this record suggests unease — only Joe Colley comes close to being this aesthetically fidgety; of course, his work tends toward the more abstract, while this tells an actual story (of sorts). Although originally intended as an LP, the pristine CD sound reinforces the artistic choices. The classical sections are clear and confessional, allowing the rough differentiation between them and the tapes to be all the more apparent - not one distortion or hum here can be blamed on a bum needle, pressing errors, or an insufficient playback system.

Lambkin understands the full power of editing. It's not a tool to collage sounds together into an agreeable assemblage. It's not even just to 'take us on a journey' as so many clods and geniuses have done through the years. It can take us places, but the best tape artists (I happily include Lambkin in the realms of certain quasi-academic sickos like Lionel Marchetti and Guido Hübner [Das Synthetische Mischgewebe]) understand that new forms of artistic confusion and unease are admirable goals for one's life. Lacking the granular synthesis toys and trinkets of academe, it never sounds as sterile or persnickety as any well-funded punks out of INA-GRM, but, working in the manner of 'Industrial concréte' types like Brume or Lt. Caramel, Lambkin fuses all the elements of the Metamkine 'scene' with tape-label viscerality, not to mention the all-consuming reverence for editing as tool of victory as espoused by the Anti-Naturals.

Salmon Run is not good for driving, doing chores, or doing anything involving passive listening. Honestly, it's not particularly fun to have on as background sound. The record really only 'works' when you give it your full attention and concentration, like a good film. Or your life.

M.O.
Where Are We Going? CD
BloodLust! / B!091

It only says M.O. on the packaging, but this is a release by Pierpaolo Zoppo's Mauthausen Orchestra, the legend of scummy hyper-violence who now produces thin synthesizer instrumentals.

The album opens with a sickeningly thin, hollow static line with some minor bumps scattered across it. Staring, leering, functional, boring even, then it ends. Another high-end, minimally layered digital tone-piss comes in as track two, like half-realized keyboard leanings, quick glossy pixilated pop-ups on a flat screen, unwanted sounds. 'When Suffering Becomes Show,' with its droning, looping paper-thin laser sounds, is more engaging than the last, at least until pushy digital delay overloads the atmosphere. I find this material much more effective when no attempts are made to be melodic, as with track four, which is basically just controlled delay feedback and some buried synth, and which yields the best material of the album. 'Confusion' introduces signal overload digital static to the palette, a sound I neither enjoy nor find any aesthetic value in. It sounds badly recorded and amateurish. The final two tracks offer more slightly melodic digital sketches. Someone should hand Pierpaolo a shortwave radio, a tape deck, a distortion pedal, and a microphone.

This aesthetic could work if it was explored more carefully and with a heavier editorial touch. This whole album could be practice for one really good 15 minute track if Zoppo pulled it all together and refined it. A track such as this would need careful textural treatments, more thoughtful layering, more restraint on melodic elements, and nothing where it sounds like he's just mashing his hand on the keyboard. Indiscriminately hitting a bunch of keys will always sound like indiscriminately hitting a bunch of keys.

Overall, the tones of the album are undesirable, and, when held in contrast to the violent history of Mauthausen Orchestra, it's definitely not the same. I don't see how this is analog synth material, if it actually is; Zoppo likely recorded it with the signal way too hot, rendering it as some digital garbage, stripping it of any textural strength. The track title 'Cellular Time Release' underlines the digital, modern-day vibe of the whole thing, and it suggests a possible justification for the annoying melodic aspects of the tracks, the mind-space of cell phone ring tones. This is hollow electronics for a modern world. It's got a pixilated artificiality which makes sense in a point-and-click pleasure environment.

It would be pointless to carry on doing the same old brutal material if that doesn't interest him, and it's good Pierpaolo has continued to develop along his own lines, as opposed to pleasing the Power Electronics/old-school Noise acolytes. How would bowing to the pleasures of others (this reviewer included) in any way follow the lineage of Mauthausen Orchestra? He's definitely not an idiot, and is producing works like this for a reason. Hopefully it'll become clearer as chapters are added. That said, this is a really incomplete feeling album, and I can only recommend it for M.O. fanatics. In the future, I can imagine a refined sickly journey of high end cheap Casio digital gloss and static flesh drive, but this album isn't it.

I should mention, on the positive side, that Megan Emish's design work is exemplary as usual, and that this has an incredibly creepy cover. As has been pointed out before, the visuals share an eerie similarity with the Bloodyminded *Mothercare* single. While the image is simply a heavily contrasted scene of an adult walking with a child amidst mass transit, the juxtaposition with the title, and knowledge of other M.O. material with track titles like 'Continental Cruising' and 'Lost In Boyz Town,' contextualizes the predatory reality. (Nick Henry)

MAMMAL
Lonesome Drifter 2LP
Animal Disguise / ADR100

"This is both the end and the beginning," states the back-cover of Gary Beauvais' latest definitive statement, and it's no exaggeration. The experiment in entropy that began with the *Fog Walkers* LP (and the tapes before it, such as *We Are Real, Walk Man Live*, and the CDr *Other Realms*) and culminated with the *Let Me Die* LP/cs (and the scads of limited edition tapes that surround it), has transformed into something entirely different. Starting his life as a neon-pink dance manipulator, the gabber-strength, rhythmically noisy blowouts like 'Fog Rhythm' were left to rot in the hot sun by the time of the follow-up, 2003's *Double Nature*, reduced to black-char, liquefied rot, topped with a high-pitch squeal that sounded like Maryanne Amacher taking a broken bottle to your ear bones.

Rotted electronics and grinding beats congealed into a primordial stew of animal decomposition for the third full-length, *Let Me Die*. If *Fog Walkers*' lead-off track 'Fog Face' made us dance, then *Let Me Die*'s 'Days Into Days' gave us the strength we needed to shuffle face-first into the meat grinder.

Today, Mammal has been reborn. His fourth vinyl/CD release is titled *Lonesome Drifter*, and while it's still full of contempt, betrayal, and entropy, the transformation into a new vessel is complete, if not wholly unexpected.

For the first time, Mammal's main weapons are conventional instruments — folks who follow Mammal only sporadically miss the glacial progression, and will probably be quite surprised by this record, as none of his prior major statements pointed toward the bony, sinew-hard bass guitar riffs that dominate this record. For example, if the last thing you heard was *Let Me Die*, and you missed the *Badlands* cassette (Animal Disguise), you wouldn't have heard 'Fatherland,' Gary's first song with vocals. Without the *Repulsion* cassette (Nihilist) on hand, the two-note, bass-driven opener 'Repulsion' might seem like it comes from another band, with only the clobbering Big Black-style drum machine to give it away.

And that's just the first two tracks. 'Cyclops' starts out with feedback-controlled majesty, the 'rising on one note' trick that almost counterbalances the negative tendencies of the first two tracks, before turning into a doom-laden progression, reminding me of the early SST 'Metal' catalog, Saint Vitus and Würm, or even early Pentagram. 'The Drift...' is best remembered for its insistent, sparse bass-drum-and-snare drum machine line, goading on a gristled bass line, one that makes of the most of its one-note, two-octave riff. There's not a lot in the way of song-craft here, but there is precision -- to make something as deliberately simple as this work, you really need to do 50-60 takes to get the sound just perfect.

Starting on Side Three, 'Drifter in the City' again uses fuzzy, chordal bass progressions to create a desolate, electric folk ballad for the modern landscape: "I've been a drifter in the city/breathing in fumes and looking behind me." 'Incinerator Ballad' is the only 'noise' piece here, a cascade of looping white static with some surprisingly taught melodies rotating freely (though deeply buried) through the middle. 'Lower Depths' again returns to vocals, even more distant, more detached. "I learn my lesson every day/I see the same things every day." As the track ends, the vocals and guitar fall out of sync, vocals little more than a half-awake mumble, the 'melody' being a repetitively strummed two-note thing. Like a stylized take on the last minutes of life, the *Lonesome Drifter* sings himself into oblivion.

This leads to the final side, which is taken up entirely by 'Cremation,' a 16 minute track that presumably represents the last vestiges of the Lonesome Drifter being extinguished, perhaps the furnace consuming all but the spirit, which will return in new form for...the next album? The track is hard, deep, robotic bass lines that manage to sound like vintage Popul Vuh, but also like the Butthole Sufers' '22 Going On 23.' Like that classic album-closer, there's a hard, minor-chord menace to the track that's subverted by a somewhat more buoyant, radiant guitar line, the bass approximating the decay of the flesh, the guitar liberating the spirit within. At the end, dingy tapes of bird sounds can be heard, a gray new land into which the Lonesome Drifter continues his journey.

Listeners who are really invested in the 'classic' Mammal sound might be a little shocked at first by *Lonesome Drifter*'s more rock-ish elements, but anyone who's followed all of the artifacts through the years probably saw this stylistic U-turn coming — the tapes have been strewn with clues. If your focus has instead been on the soul-crushing misanthropy, the withdrawal from life and other humans, this record (for both the gatefold-essential cover art by Beauvais, and for the fact that this is really one of the best double-albums in recent memory, the vinyl version is essential) carries on the dedication to contempt and disgust with a ferocity that should disappoint no one.

MANIA
Armed To The Teeth CD
PACRec/Troniks / PACrec138/TRO-288

MANIA
Ultra-Negative CD
Freak Animal / FA-CD-043

MANIA
Hate Like Hell cs
Gaping Hole / none

Keith Brewer's Mania project, which is based around scrap metal and the ecstasy of fetishistic physical noise (in contrast with Taint's grotesque Power Electronics lechery), adds real heavy artillery to his scrap metal assault on *Armed to the Teeth*, via field recording of an artillery festival. Rounds of pistol fire, automatic rifles, and all manner of high-velocity gunfire ensue, none of it edited or arranged in a detached manner, like David Jackman's 'Machine Guns' recordings, but presented voyeuristically, giving us a taste of the pleasure of discharging round after round of hot lead. The guns sound like they get more and more deadly as the recording goes on, with one particular model, possibly a Thompson submachine gun, unloading its payload so quickly, and in such quantity, the clatter of shells on the ground sounds like falling rain. A gun like that could probably reduce your average bison to a heap of pudding in less than a minute. Armed to the teeth, indeed.

But that's only seven or eight minutes of the disc. The rest of the 35-minute recording consists of Mania's scrap metal abuse, augmented with dirty distortion and junkyard atmosphere. I would have imagined, based on previous recordings, that this would be a much more frenzied assault, but the first 10 minutes has a pace comparable to nothing so much as Throbbing Gristle's 'Hamburger Lady' — morose and morbidly shuffling around the room, vocals sounding like depressive moans. It's one of those recordings where you can just feel the performer interacting seamlessly with their tools, everything coming together perfectly. I could analyze for you all night, but really, I can get no further here than to say that this just FEELS like good noise — it's morose, tough, thought out without being fussy, and mostly, just plain physical (if not supremely painful). We return to the field recordings at the end, the gunfire reaching its target, a far-off car filled with tanks of gasoline and explosives. The subsequent boom sets off car alarms and provokes giddy laughter from the participants.

Ultra-Negative starts with a barrage of metal junk that fills a deep, aching hole inside, that desire for brazen metallic chaos, before traveling in a more electronic direction than the PACrec disc. Aaron Dilloway's credited 'white noise' contributions put the focus more on the amp than the scrap iron, though the sharp edges of the junk metal are left to jut out above the smothered vocal wails, this time more pained and less depressive. 'Corkscrew' starts with what sounds like high-pitched shortwave, while reverb'd vocals push their way up through mountains of pressurized junk sound, with old-school WASP-like wheedles squeezed into every crack and crevice between the junk-chucking. 'Blowtorch' really gets going around the four-minute mark: nasty, hard vocals, big crashing, carefully held reverb and delay loops sent into the air like a burnt offering. Brewer has a great control of feedback on this track, and of the three albums here, this feels the most innovative, a combination of crisp production and out of the ordinary combinations of metallics and atmospherics. The contrast of the black and white, largely artillery/machinery based collage artwork on the outside with the fleshy porn collage inside seals the deal.

Hate Like Hell, as the title would suggest, is the most vituperative of the three, giving listeners the most junk metal for the money in its 20 minute running time. The creaking, thudding metal objects being tossed around sound similar to *Ultra-Negative*, but there's more of a separation between noise elements and junk elements. Whereas *Ultra-Negative* seemed to coat its metal junk with distortion, here it sounds more like there's a junk layer and an unconnected, possibly overdubbed noise layer. And over the top of everything, Brewer's vocals launch into their most bitter, aggrieved outbursts so far — he's gone from pain to fury now. The distortion and electronic elements are as focused as I remember them to be on Vemod's *If They Move...Kill 'em* cassette, while the junk thunder is the best I've heard so far on any release. It's always a smart move to put your best material on the unlimited-run release.

The best part of all three of these Mania releases is that none of them steps on the toes of any other. They all sound like the same project, but there are so many differences in the sound, tension level, and mood of each that you never feel like you've just bought the same album three times. From a strictly logistical viewpoint, *Ultra-Negative* should receive your attention first, as it's the most limited of the three, but you really can't go wrong with anything.

DANIEL MENCHE
Bleeding Heavens CD
Blossoming Noise / BN026 CD

Daniel Menche has become increasingly focused over the past few years in investigating the possibilities of engaging elements of acoustic instrumentation into his work, creating impossibly rich pieces of drone-like sound immersion from severely effected source material — here being 'organ and trumpet destruction' for *Bleeding Heavens*. Some results may have been a little bland — the *Beast Resonator* CD on Roggbif comes to mind — but for this CD, Daniel has his creative, engineering and compositional skills honed for probably his most solid and consistent CD in a long time.

Morphed residue of the acoustic instrumentation remains in some of the textural highlights, particularly if you look hard — that pulsating shimmer at the end of the second track is an organ if you think about it — but others are so far removed from their source, there's no telling what they were or are, save to appreciate that each is ideally crafted to sit where it does in the sonic tableau and ensuring, where required, that these tracks swell into vibrantly gorged excesses — often with only a small set of individual elements (the third track stands out in this respect).

The final track dips a little, insofar as dynamic interest goes (admittedly, compared to the crescendo of the first, it was always going to struggle in this respect) — it also allows a little more of the untampered organ source material to peer through – but don't let that detract from what is otherwise, so far, the pinnacle of Menche's explorations in this field. (Chris Groves)

MENSTRUATION SISTERS
Ma LP
No Fun Productions / NFP29

Showering us with a wild downpour of inhuman babbling, this much-needed reissue of the first Menstruation Sisters record puts ugly bruises on the chest of any mock-primitive caveman grunt-rock you'd like to pit against it in open-hand combat. Explaining that Oren Ambarchi is somehow involved will likely put you on the wrong scent — step inside these wild animal cages, and you'll witness musical barbarism that even makes Amon Duul's *Psychedelic Underground* seem like the product of homes with roofs, insulated walls, and central air. If that album sounded like cavemen discovered guitars and bongos in a forest clearing, the Menstruation Sisters sound like nothing so much as a gorilla locked in a cage with a drumkit while a wild boar repeatedly head-butts a stringed instrument, emitting a split-tone cry like a hapless sacrifice victim in a Mondo film.

There is spirit and beauty here, but nothing I would call precisely 'human,' and that's just about as high as my praise gets. Although I still pretty much keep up with everything this band does, I found them quite a bit less involving when they got 'good' without getting better. With the exception of a few 'evolved' tracks on side two that involve synths and cheap drum machines, this a harrowing, beautiful, REALLY harrowing, needful document of animal instinct that makes many similar 'voice improv' attempts sound genuinely Calvinist. It's the sound your deepest inner self makes constantly while you sleepwalk through your dead-end work day. Let it all out — again and again.

MNEM/DIETER MÜH
Atomyriades CD
Cipher Productions / (sic 49)

Finnish reel-to-reel degenerates MNEM found here in collusion with one half of UK's industrial ambassadors Dieter Müh (only Dave Uden contributes to the recordings; Steve Cammack provided track titles and is credited as 'Spiritual Advisor' to the recordings).

Although I normally associate MNEM's work with a dirty, analogue, corroded sound due to their use of ancient reel-to-reel tape loops and ramshackle sonic accoutrements, the sound on *Atomyriades* is very clean, slippery, and digital. Granted, certain tracks achieve a sound that could be described as 'slimy

digital,' bringing to mind sections of Autechre's *Draft 7.30*, but it's occasionally hard to hear MNEM's signature sound amidst the buffed and polished Müh-sheen.

Especially nice moments include the opener, 'Galan Taetri,' with its pulse-pounding martial beat and headphone-tickling test tones bouncing around; 'Voljan Nal,' which sounds like dying robots patrolling a dead spacecraft in a dead portion of a desolate galaxy; and 'The Return Line,' which puts fire under a kettle of frustration, finally unleashing some grittier textures, its final moments seeming to feed back into the first moments of 'Galan Taetri,' one giant Moebius strip of sound, endlessly winding back on itself. Midway through the disc, though, attention starts to wane, and the slickly, digitally-produced tones and foursquare compositions cause some waning of attention. If you spend a lot of time listening to 'ambient' music, I think some of these tricks and gestures may appeal to you more than I, but it was sometimes hard to keep focused on this record. It drifts...probably intentionally. The more organic elements (Uden's Tibetan singing bowl and Moroccan flute) are subsumed, along with MNEM's crackly decay, into a vessel of liquid mercury, slippery and ultimately non-substantive. I wasn't underwhelmed, but I wasn't particularly overwhelmed, either. Let's go with 'whelmed,' then.

MUTANT APE
What's Left? CD
Turgid Animal / TA353

George Proctor's first pro-pressed CD of his project comes to us in the form of several cherry-picked favorite moments from assorted split sides, mini-CDs, and other bits that wouldn't otherwise constitute a full-length. A similar tactic is used on Sickness's *Mudlark* CD (reviewed elsewhere in this issue), and in both cases, what would seem like an odds-and-sods compilation feel in fact comes together pretty well as a discrete album.

While I could never in good conscience accept a medal for 'largest Mutant Ape collection,' my gut tells me that the Power Electronics tendencies that represent the bulk of the tracks here constitute a new direction for Proctor. One of the best tracks on the disc comes from a clutch of pieces originally featured on a split with UK PE brethren Shift. 'Post-Violence' is a truly innovative-sounding track, using a combination of start-stop metal hammering, paranoiac beeping sounds, and expert mixing-board gymnastics to conjure the image of legions of carnage-bots stomping through the blighted streets, starting and stopping their killing sprees at weird, precise intervals. Grimier than Control and more varied even than all but the best Shift tracks, this is a masterful piece of fish-struggling-on-the-hook tension.

With most of the tracks here coming from split releases, the centerpiece of the disc, three tracks from a triple biz-card set on Dumping Ground, could logically be seen as the 'pure' Mutant Ape sound, in the sense that they're not influenced by the sounds of the other performer. 'Blue' (originally titled 'Blue as a Dead Baby,' hmmm) flips back and forth between excellent layers of crunch and rattle as the compactor trundles onward. 'Feeding Myths' has a good whiplash sound — contact mics rubbing against long metal objects, hysterical vocals, and a big, room-filling sound. Very good, though the occasional compositional trick of killing all but the vocal track isn't so hot. The CD's title track is an Institut-style chunk of low-end Euro PE, vocals arrogant and deranged like an arsonist cackling and punching the air in front of a house he just ignited as it burns down.

There are plenty of great tracks throughout. 'Keep the Hate' is grim like Terrence Stamp, its frog-man vocals and stagnant tones contrasted with Whitehouse-style shearing high-ends and wheedly mic feedback. The strange, bellicose vocals remind me, incorrectly but evocatively, of the seldom-heard project VD, which consisted of Sickness and Taint in a strange but unique pairing. 'Controlled Breeding' (from the split tape with Grunt) emulates Mikko Aspa's booming low-end sound, eliminating the midrange in favor of skittering highs over a rough layer of deep, ass-damaging rumbles, scarring the landscape and sucking life from the room. At the same time, many of the tracks from split releases sound suspiciously similar to their flipside counterparts — bit of a *Zelig* thing happening as the Shift tracks sound a lot like Shift, and the Grunt track having something in common with Grunt. Not that that's an unpardonable offense or anything — a split release can be good when both participants are on the same page, and nobody truly imitates another without bringing their own take, whether intentionally or not. Donald Miller of Borbetomagus used to say he was 'just trying to imitate what the saxes were doing' when playing, but of course, the results were anything but derivative.

As said, not everything here is distinctive, and it's hard to call this an end-to-end classic. But, as Proctor tries new directions, expands his sound into realms beyond harsh noise, it'll be interesting to see if this disc serves as the first step into the next level of Mutant Ape's development, or just as an odd anomaly along the way.

NERVE NET NOISE
Dark Garden CD
Intransitive Recordings / INT029

When we last left our heroes, they were being berated by the Italian press as 'a big, shitty fraud.' (An approximate translation of the review of their previous album, *Meteor Circuit*, also on Intransitive.) Time, of course, will be kinder to these two men than it will be to BlowUp e-zine, but the prickly reaction often given to NNN is worth noting — this is not a band that can be easily digested and 'enjoyed,' even in the way the harshest of noise can be enjoyed. The NNN sound grates, and not just sonically, but through the extreme use of repetition. To understand why, we need to dig into the duo's methodology. The two performers program their synthesizers to play themselves, often tilting the settings toward instability. Thus, while we essentially get the same loops of sound repeating over and over for long (long!) periods of time, the frequencies will slowly collide with each other, providing at least minimal alterations over time. By the end of the tracks (usually in the 7 to 10 minute range each), something has changed, but not much.

The lack of human interaction unnerves some, perhaps, because there's so much less opportunity for heroism in the form of unwanted virtuosity — nobody will save you from that grating loop that just keeps going and going. It's hard not to see some small parallel in methodology to John Cage's compositions — for as much time as goes into the compositional process (or in this case, the process of programming the synth), once the piece starts, process and chance direct the sounds until the 'stop' button is pushed, and authorial intent is removed from all aspect of the process save for the initial selections — nobody reacts to anything that is happening, nor tries to change it. That might be what BlowUp was getting at — the group doesn't actually play these songs so much as set them up to play themselves. Fraud? Not to these ears.

In comparison with the group's even more bellicose early recordings, *Meteor Circuit* was something of a tempering, with quieter and frequently humorous sounds and moments appearing amidst 17-minute opuses of high-velocity data-crunch. *Dark Garden* plays even nicer still, giving us shorter tracks (seven minutes is the upper limit here), more of them, and an all-encompassing theme, namely the micro/macro relationship between the interplay of the forest and its inhabitants and the complimentary play between your 'self' and your vital organs. Which is to say that some songs are about moths and snails and trees, and others are about....well...your liver.

Unlike a previous NNN album (*Various Amusements*, on the Hrönir label) which claimed to be 'about' things a schoolgirl likes to do (including talk on the phone, put on makeup, and take a nap [?]) but sounded like volcanic eruptions of ultra-harsh and spastic synth noise, *Dark Garden* sounds more or less like the things it's supposed to be about, and does so in more synth-y ways, sometimes appropriating timbres and sounds from Techno music and various eras of synth-pop. 'Bubbles of Time' is appropriately bubbly and primordial, and 'Blood Have Everything You Need' has a methodical throb that can, if you squint hard enough, remind you of your circulatory system. 'Forest' sounds like a forest in the way that Subotnick's *The Wild Bull* sounds like a wild bull, which is to say, it doesn't, but it does because you know it's supposed to.

So, if the tracks here are more literal, and the synth tones more forgiving, does that make *Dark Garden* a more accessible album? Well, yes and no. Obviously, anything that hurts less while listening is, by nature, more accessible. But, the repetitions that drive the NNN engine are still here, and they can still be the source of consternation for the uninitiated (and, of course, a source of joy for the NNN fanatic). The loops are often asymmetrical — nothing you could dance to without an extra leg — and exceptionally complex, which asks your brain to come to grips with something that is both squirrelly and more than 15 seconds long. Each track's textures are played against each other in beautiful, beguiling contrasts, and it just can't be emphasized enough that this band sounds like nothing else out there, which ought to be an automatic thumbs-up in this era of musical over-saturation.

It can be easy to get into a habit with Harsh Noise — like any other form of rush, the returns diminish, and the true peaks come less and less frequently as we become somewhat dulled to things that once (even for a day or two) caused us true panic and consternation. The best noise should still cause little panic attacks inside — that's what you come to this stuff for, right? — and just as I don't really listen to Runzelstirn & Gurgelstock, Prurient, or Xenakis to 'rock out' (I'll gladly cop to the fact that *Asshole/Snail Dilemma* still kind of terrifies me), *Dark Garden* should be saved for those moments when you want to give your ears a chuckle and a sharp poke with a stick at the same time.

THE NEW BLOCKADERS
Das Zerstoren, Zum Gebaren CD
Blossoming Noise / BN028CD

What is this now...third? Fourth? Fifth 'final live performance' ever? I don't know, or care...I'm sick of arguing that point. It's pretty obvious at this point that the 'final's will be flowing for years, if not decades, to come, especially when you consider that TNB has been saying 'farewell' longer than they were in existence as a group! Don't believe me? Check the timeline...*The Final Recordings* LP with Ferial Confine, the first sign of a 'checking out' period, came out in 1991. So, even as I bring up this point, I will attempt to quash it once again, relegating it to the realm of 'duh' statements like 'It's going to be a cold winter,' 'It sure takes a long time to board an airplane,' and 'Waiting in line at the post office is eating my soul incrementally.'

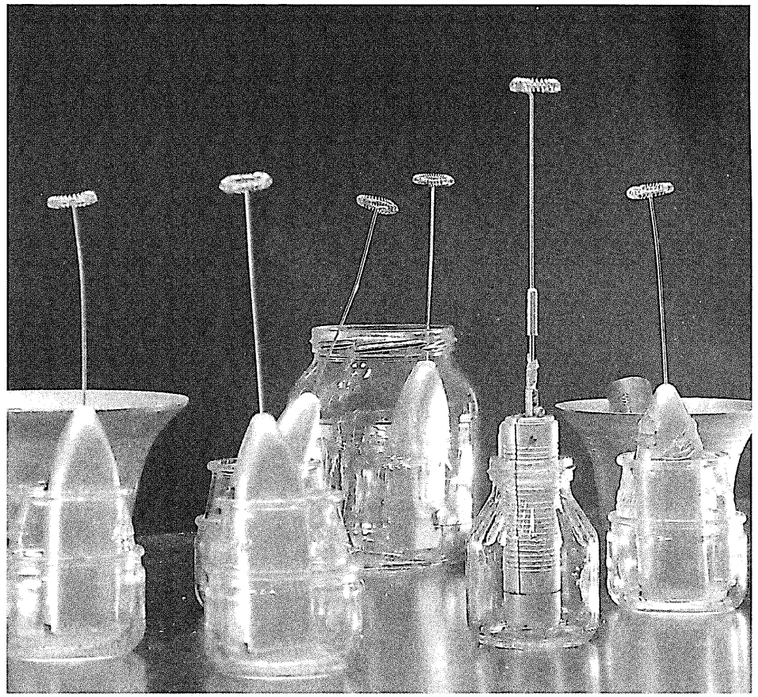
As the 'final' live events keep unspooling like so much nihilistic ticker-tape, the lineups of TNB get further stretched and further removed from the original core of Rupenus brothers...it's generally assumed that Philip is out of the picture entirely, and that Richard acts as more of a 'spiritual advisor' than an active participant anymore — far-flung conspiracy theorists suggest that Richard hasn't taken place in a 'final' concert in over a decade. Of course, only his balaclava launderer knows for sure. Fine, that means TNB is a brand and not a band... so what's the fuss?

I guess there isn't that much of one. If you like TNB, you generally like TNB-approved products. Usually, I do too. This particular lineup of the group (recorded live on stage at All Tomorrow's Parties) surely must have been an act to remember if you were there, as it constituted the biggest TNB group incarnation of the project yet seen, with guests ranging from Ben Jones and Hasan Gaylani (of Jazzfinger), to Damion Romero, to Dave Phillips and Joke Lanz, all of whom obviously know their craft as individuals. At the same time, not all of these people sound like, or could really even do a realistic replica of, the TNB sound. No biggie there...the collab with Gosplan Trio still felt like TNB, what with that acrid scent of eau de scrapyard wafting up from the jazz wreckage.

Here, the sound is a bit different. It drifts...and I mean DRIFTS. Sounding at times like a junkyard being cast adrift onto a nearby asteroid, there's a far-off quality to this that blankets the usual TNB immediacy. There's a lot more sampler than I've heard from the group in, well, ever, including a recurring loop of what sounds like a woman shrieking that, while enjoyable enough, keeps me looking back at my CD player to see who I'm listening to now. Really? This is still that TNB album?

To be sure, there's a lot to like on the record. There is still some enjoyable junk-fuck attitude throughout, and plenty of moments here and there to tickle the cochleas. But there's plenty of distracting business, too: there's at least three false finales, points where things could have been wrapped up quite nicely, and yet the group struggles to find the ending; a serious case of aimless drifting starts coming up around minute 25; and in general, the large-lineup incarnation of the group dilutes the intensity you tend to expect from TNB.

Look, I've got no issue with experimenting with the formula, and I've generally been pretty engaged with most of the collaborations, especially the radical departures. Cobbling bits and bobs together into an assemblage is one thing, but sometimes you have to make the painful admission that the pile which stands before you really doesn't add up to much. All the samplers, synth sounds, and smoother textures turn this from yet another classic final TNB gasp into another 40 minute atmospheric collaborative drone album, an album ultimately unworthy of the name The New Blockaders, and finally, I think that's the issue here — *Das Zerstoren* suffers from too much something, and not enough nothing.



Das Synthetische Mischgewebe. Sound installation (detail)

THE NEW BLOCKADERS / DAS SYNTHETISCHE MISCHGEWEBE
The Monosyllabic Bicycles Tri-Coloured Quadruples LP + 7-inch set
Equation Records / E=mc18

In a recent collab with fellow English gobsmacker Putrefier (titled *Schleifmittelbögen*, limited to 500 copies), TNB's materials were lovingly returned to their own personal birth-place, the rusty tool shed of the classic *Changez Le Blockeurs* LP. It was a glorious collage of unadorned metallic clamour, assembled with great attention, a gift for those who care for and love their impression of the Folkways *Sounds of the Junkyard* LP (though damned if I know anybody that actually owns a copy). On this deluxe collaboration with Das Synthetische Mischgewebe's Guido Hübner, similar TNB source material veers out in multiple new and less expected directions, retaining only a portion of its trademark dirtbag nature, and, at the same time, toughening the sound of Hübner's machinations, as a wide variety of sounds, from industrial debris to close-mic scuffle to *Cartridge Music* minutiae, share equal time on the splicing block. Spread out in the second most awkward way possible over the two pieces of vinyl, the program is symmetrical, with a 20 minute track, two seven-minute tracks, and another 20 minute track to close things out.

After a very standard TNB-styled opener full of grubbing industrial clutter on Side One of the LP, Side B (Side 1 of the 7-inch) contains some attention-getting false finales, breaking Hübner 's tendency towards over-consistency and turning the piece into something that holds your attention. Flip ye the dinky platter and we come into a humid environment in which Rupenus' base sounds resemble nothing so much as a living swamp, with all manners of chirrups, burbles, and far-off breathing and groaning dotting the landscape. It's sloppy and messy, but intentionally so, the sounds of hot spatters in a very dirty kitchen.

Side D is the scratchiest yet, with a lot of close-mic vinyl scraping, Velcro ripping, balloon rubbing, dog brushing, and other forceful sonic proclamations, somewhat of a low-key finale. My worries about homogeneity for four sides were unfounded...let's have a drink!

Before we do, though, mention must be made of the package. Sure, it's fine, thick vinyl, lovely full-colored labels, and a charming little 7-inch sleeve with numbered inner-sleeve, the LP housed in a Japanese-style round-bottom inner-sleeve with numbered sticker. All fine. However, the cover itself needs a swat on the ass. The cardboard used to make the cover is SO thick, it's literally impossible to fit the LP inside! Even if you weren't already a record dork who only sleeves your records by keeping the vinyl on the outside of the cover in the plastic sleeve, you can't even 'properly' sleeve the record if you want to. Seriously, if you're going to make an artifact that is this bloated by its own luxury, why not just seal the fourth side and make it what it really is - a heavy two-sided insert? That worked fine for the TNB reissue of *Live At Anti-Fest* on Hospital, and the M.O. 'Smooth Hate' 7-inch on Bloodlust! But if you're going to allow even the POSSIBILITY of letting me be reckless with my records and shelving one inside of the other (ring-wear be damned), then you gotta test it out before it goes into the stores. Even the most luxurious packages must genuflect just a hair in the direction of functionality; otherwise, it's just a fat king with a heavy crown, sinking pitifully off its throne and clattering onto the steps below.

NIHILIST ASSAULT GROUP
Silent Movie One-sided LP/DVD set
Hospital Productions / HOS-142

What could have been merely a document of a highly anticipated six minute performance has become a striking art object, a forceful strike against the notion of being able to fully capture a live performance on record.

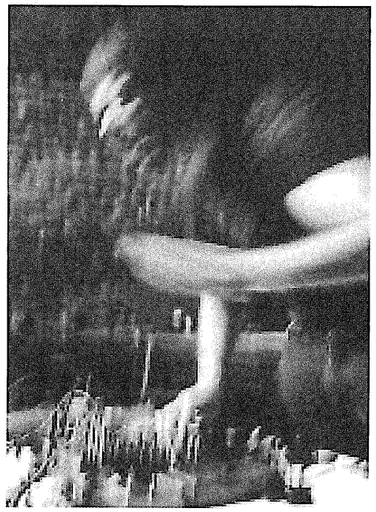
What seems at first to be an anti-art prank in practice feels somewhat profound in execution. A performance by Nihilist Assault Group (originally a trio of Richard Rupenus [The New Blockaders], Ron Lessard [Emil Beaulieau] and Dominick Fernow [Prurient], but now seeming to encompass a variety of local noise talent) was captured at 2006's No Fun Festival, but is here split into a DVD featuring the visuals but no sound, and a corresponding one-sided LP. Somehow, the fact that it's completely impossible to perfectly sync sound and image with this setup dissociates this 'accurate recording of live performance' from reality. Like the silent movies of yore, the accompaniment seems displaced from the element, almost as if it was created by someone else entirely. This slight out-of-phase effect renders the event, this second-hand account of a moment in time as something altogether more artificial than the more naturally-captured performance found on the *Fun From None* DVD, which also documents that year's festival. GX Jupitter-Larsen's DVD commentary (rendered as text on the screen, not audio; it's a silent DVD, remember) further reinforces this disconnect: after a long section about the essentially democratic/gestalt aspects of bacteria ("Bacteria are by far the simplest creatures alive. Yet, a colony of *Paenibacillus Detriforum* bacteria can organize themselves into different types of extravagant formations to maximize food intake") and touching an aspect of brain chemistry that seems to explain aesthetic refinement of the long-term enjoyment of horrible noise ("A brain cell can grow more sensitive to a signal that it receives repeatedly, resulting in a reinforcement of signaling circuits and learning") before hitting you with the 2 x 4. Long after the images are finished, the commentary continues, at which point we see the following: "I am lucky if my eyes are looking at what I am watching. I am lucky if my ears are listening to what I am hearing. How often do you see what you're hearing? The screen is black for a reason."

The statement goads the listener/viewer into admitting that their eyes are not 'looking at what they're watching' and their ears are not 'listening to what they're hearing,' not only because the sound and visuals are intrinsically out of phase, but because we're watching the 'live' performance second hand. It also seems to scold the modern tendency towards mindless consumption of both noise as sound and the noise object ("How often do you see what you're hearing?"). Maybe it's not E=MC2, but it sure as shit beats 'have a good time, all the time.'

NMPERIGN/SKELETONS OUT
'Marvin/Live 1978' split 7-inch
Editions Zero / #19

A natural and logical split single between these two long-running Boston improv duos. There's a neat contrast between the two, as one duo uses only standard musical instruments, and the other uses slightly less conventional tools (tapes and turntable), yet both create a prickly, scratchy mood analogous to Cage's 'Cartridge Music' more than any standard Euro free improv. Nmperign's commitment to making a soprano sax and trumpet sound like tape hiss and badly-grounded cables is well established — they've been at it for over a decade now — and their side refines the process even further. Greg Kelley has managed to make blowing into a trumpet sound exactly like tape hiss, and with one small moment of tonality, Bhob Rainey's soprano sax generates a host of metallic interjections, with a sound/silence construction that resembles the most delicate moments of the Schimpfluch collective (if such a thing as 'delicate Schimpfluch' exists). Skeletons Out, featuring Howard Stelzer on tapes and Jay Sullivan on turntable, has a nasty but austere atmosphere, almost like Small Cruel Party at times, but with subtle hints of Stelzer's smeary tape-screeching within the static cascade.

The artwork from Editions Zero is just oversized enough to be slightly larger than other 7" records, with strange, colorful photographs glued on each side. For no reason I can discern, my copy also came with a DVD promising a tour of the Everglades.



Oscillating Innards. Photo by Wild Don Lewis

OSCILLATING INNARDS
Nadir Emergence CD
Troniks/Iatrogenesis / TRO-291/IR057

In the wake of a pile of limited tapes, CDrs, one-sided LPs, and other 'smaller' media, *Nadir Emergence* has the feel of a 'doctoral dissertation' project — it feels like this is being presented as the final step in a long and arduous process of study and experimentation, a consolidation and synthesis of past ideas and a definitive statement for the world, perhaps on the cusp of a new change of direction. You can tell the moment you break the cellophane that this CD is meant to be the definitive Oscillating Innards release.

For all of that, though, access to this album didn't come easy...three or four listens in, and I was still convinced that something was wrong, that energy was being squandered needlessly, and that there were issues with flow. Not wanting to leave it at that, though, I listened to it several more times, both on headphones and especially on loud speakers, which is when it hit me. This isn't a harsh noise album at all — the harsh passages are not there for texture, nor are they there for migraine inducement/relief, but as exclamation points. I thought the album was squandering its momentum by following blisteringly harsh sequences with comparatively sedate mood pieces, long stretches of miasmic drift and islets of relative calm, but I was looking at it backwards. The mood is the story, and the outbursts merely punctuations. This is a very narrative-based album, full of drama, periods of movement and dislocation, the mood punctured only occasionally by Gordon Ashworth's vocal roars.

Said roars are only a small part of the story, and the album is full of little moments; far off piano chords collide with atmospheres that are constantly and subtly adding and subtracting background textures. The final five minutes of the disc cycles back to themes introduced at the beginning of the record, a self-referential gesture that reasserts *Nadir Emergence* as a through-written album, not just an improvised toss-off. It's still not my favorite recent album, but multiple listens deepened my appreciation for Ashworth and his definitive statement. I guess I'll be on board for whatever happens next.

OSCILLATING INNARDS
Grey Variables 12-inch EP
Dogma Chase / DOGMA 07

Nadir Emergence struck me as more of a composed, focused piece of experimental sound, rather than an all-out noise attack, but it's obvious from the first seconds that this record has other intentions. Cut at 45 RPM "for maximum frequency and sparkling dynamics," *Grey Variables* carries a lot of buried details within its whiplash blasts. High, metallic shearing, slivers of aluminum peeling (and pealing like bells, too), trace elements of heavy metals near the bottom of the periodic table entering your bloodstream while your skin is consumed by the volcanic morass. Melodic whines flicker and disappear under the surface, while the pressure of the bass expands and contracts, changing the quality of the air in the room. Rusty hinges explode into the mix, like architectural rot written on the side of a mountain. The combination of clanking and fizzling sounds is like showers of sparks jumping off of an abraded I-beam, deep rumbles transforming into a high-pitched siren, wavered into mean feedback. I'm still not convinced of Ashworth's screaming, though I like the processing it's put through...it sounds like he's screaming from inside of a small metal box. The side ends on a hissy, multi-tonal hum, a placated sound after a successful ritual.

Side Two starts right where Side One left off, with the same hum again filling the room. This time, a dockside ambience dominates, with far off vehicles passing by in the distance, an environment of portentous unease. Far-off clanks and hums are foregrounded by chromatic frequencies, like the ghost of a pipe organ, before entering the sealed recesses of deep space on a rather decrepit space ship. This side is like the hummings of deep space, but with a grimy edge that removes it from true 'ambient music.' Crackling fire sounds increase the intensity, rising until your entire house is in flames. Wobbling bass pulses and crackling waves of menace; it always seems like someone is about to start yelling behind it. Considering the attention to structural detail throughout, the ending feels a bit abrupt, jettisoning us back to earth rather brusquely.

As usual, Dogma Chase excels in the presentation and design fields, simple and elegant: a cardstock cover (no back), banded with an obi, a black and white postcard, and a record pressed on milky-clear vinyl. The package is all layers of tactile black and gray, just like the sonics. Like all Dogma Chase releases, this is highly recommended.

PRURIENT
Cocaine Death CD
Hospital Productions / HOS-232

PRURIENT
Arrowhead CD
Editions Mego / eMEGO 091

PRURIENT
The Black Post Society CD
Cold Spring Records / CSR85CD

PRURIENT
'Crossbow' 7-inch
Dot Dot Dot / dotdotdot008v

As Dominick Fernow develops increasing clarity over his project's intent and the means to realize these ideas (and make no mistake, this is a project of ideas as much as sound), Prurient's releases become less like Power Electronics (though they are PE, even now), and more like puzzle boxes, each sound, vocal, lyric, and visual representation of the material (via the usual densely-packed photo booklet/artwork) requiring some baffling combination of deductive logic, cultural literacy, and associative thinking on the part of the listener. Some releases seem to want to lead you toward a conclusion, while others are far more elusive and inwardly drawn, uncaring of whether or not you get it or don't. As Fernow noted in his interview in the third issue of Night Science magazine, "The worst days of my life have been coincidentally some of the best Prurient performances, which goes back to an idea of this not being entertainment — while it may be entertaining or fun, that's not the intent. The intent is to express and build an emotional atmosphere." This concept can be baffling to a newcomer, who might be drawn in by a multi-pronged, full-bodied album like *Black Vase*, only to be put off by the no-fidelity headache that is the *African Division* tape, returning again to a short, focused shock like the 'Church of Ammunition' single soon after. It's all part of a much broader map of interior human emotions and their cultural touchstones, as well as a desire to let art be occasionally indistinct in the interest of expressing indistinct emotions. As such, even a cluster of Prurient releases dispatched at around the same time can have a wide spread of concepts and degrees of inaccessibility.

Cocaine Death is a Hospital release that compiles a trilogy of limited edition tapes, adding a pair of bookend tracks (themselves forming a 'never-released diptych' entitled *Necrocolonialist*) to create a single, long-form work. There's a lot to say about this release, and a lot to think about. My initial impression, based on the album title, the track titles, and some of the lyrics, was that it was a eulogy to an old friend (maybe an ex?) who overdosed on a Caribbean vacation. The large booklet of photographs, however, seems to paste together a different story. I assumed that the woman on the cover, dressed for clubbing and clutching the arm of a similarly-attired friend, was the deceased here. The blurry, telephoto nature of the image suggests far-off, obsessive longing, and the model's gaze, facing an entirely different direction, indicates that she doesn't know she's being shot. However, after all the clues start to come together (the lyrics, the mood, the images, the texts, the outside research), I wonder if the cover photo is detective evidence instead. Maybe the victim of the 'cocaine death' is the family mentioned in the opening track, the 'man/his children' or 'wife/her grandchildren.' The tracks from the ultra-limited *Tylenol Murders* tape (ed. 20, Hospital Productions) further muddies the waters, with its lyrics concerning a plant that traps insects that are "drowned in the water present at the bottom of the pitcher" and "digested by certain enzymes secreted by special glands in the wall." The title of the piece is 'Women, Historically, Use Poison To Kill.'

The images enclosed, seemingly arranged like an evidence file, suggest a tension between the 'clean' side of the privileged beach resort and the 'gritty' side. The images start with an angled view of the resort mansion, framed by the words, "That Sort Of Thing," and end with horses walking along a beach (shades of Tarkovsky's use of horses to represent the human spirit). Other images (a handrail leading off a stone dock into the ocean; close-up of a seaweed-covered cable [victim a boat owner... maybe he gave boat rides to tourists]; dogs smelling each other's scent while standing up to their bellies in the water [club scene, courtship, mating]; entrance to 'trash' facility [human attributes?]; Tourist motorboats juxtaposed with a beach, ruined boat in the yard of a residential area, very run-down; Crabs in a cage contrasted with a ruined pickup truck, blue, now un-drivable, another form of 'TRASH.'; recycling area, rows and tiers of cast-offs — boat motors, motorcycles, a canoe [maybe this is someone's backyard?]; Piles of empty glass bottles [beer bottles mostly, natch...it is a resort, after all] hemmed in three deep by cinderblocks; a building ruined to its foundations [or possibly being rebuilt], contrasted with another un-drivable pickup [this one pink, contrasted with the blue one previous]; finally, a grave site with white wooden crosses beneath a gnarled tree, contrasted with a similarly knotty tree in the next image, growing in a family backyard, clothes hanging to dry on the line, broken basketball hoop, a small concrete fence; then, the horses.

The 'Pretext' track, titled 'Bahamian Burial,' reads like a Burroughs cut-up of the obituary of a person with no one left behind to embellish the details of the person's life, and is the most Power Electronics-sounding track here, declamatory and fearful. The tracks from the 'Cocaine Death' tape are more Black Metal-like in their structure, with buzzing, melodic minor-key synth melodies and clear, precise enunciation of the lyrics. (Take note, Power Electronics projects that want listeners to obsessively study your message/themes: INCLUDE PRINTED LYRICS! They're essential for deepening an obsession.) The tracks from 'Caribbean Overdose' change direction, mimicking the sound of the sea, with full, thunderous white-noise tumbling and vocals that alternately wail behind the waterfall ('Lay By Son') and groan clinically, murmuring low ('Garden of Tranquility'), both describing an undersea plant mating ritual, a fairly easy deductive leap to make in imagining what comes next in the narrative relationship. The tracks from 'Tylenol Murders' turn more predatory, their cloying description of a plant that drowns its prey locks in the concept of the trilogy. 'Eve of Adam' begins prettily, but with ear-piercing high-pitched processing on the staccato vocals, barking the clinical description of the plant in the manner of a witness reluctantly, nervously testifying before a jury. 'Historically, Women Use Poison To Kill' is beautiful, melancholic, and obscure, drifting off into drug-laced slumber.

Was this a murder by a spurned lover? A rich girl (or boy) who met someone from 'the other side of the tracks' and laced their blow when May turned into September? The possible answers are tantalizingly out of reach, but the questions remain tantalizingly in the mind long afterward.

Arrowhead, by comparison, is the antithesis of intrigue, mystery, or accessibility, an archival recording released four years after its recording by the Editions Mego label. It's self-contained, with only a bare minimum of information or imagery, headache-inducingly loud and shrill, and free of 'clues.' *Arrowhead* was recorded right in the middle of a span of five recordings that I think of as the 'noise orchestra with percussion' phase of Prurient, a chronology that includes 'Three Sisters' (Prurient's side of the *New England* 5LP box set on RRR) and 'White' (side of the split LP with Kites on Load) right before, and *Fossil* (CD on Truculent) and *Black Vase* (CD on Load) afterward. Like many of those records, this is constructed primarily with piercing, barbarous feedback, the type that gets into the inside of your skull and vibrates every membrane, subdivided only by percussion hits, far-off moaning ("I want to die with you") and forceful, frustrated grunts on 'Sternum.' 'Ribcage' expertly harnesses feedback with less percussion. 'Lungs' is a short piece of roiling percussion, tape-damaged and glazed with feedback. Given its lineage and historical vintage, it's a mystery what Editions Mego wanted with this title — the connection, and I assume there must be some, given how often Fernow notes that "projects are made for specific people, things, events or labels," may be its commitment to ear-shattering high-end feedback, comparable in its way to an album like Pita's *Seven Tons For Free*, or Hecker's *It Iso161975*.

The Black Post Society is even more obscure, more cyclical, and, at the same time, more accessible to newcomers, with the sharp edges of earlier works appearing only in controlled bursts. Opening tracks 'Specter Of A Child' and 'Forever Hate' sound a bit Post-Punk in their construction, with synth arpeggios, rhythm boxes, a bit of Blade Runner ambience, even some IDM touches, including a drum machine part that slows down and speeds up gradually throughout. When the rhythms drop out and the mood pieces remain, it's almost more spaghetti western-like. If you're looking for similarities, Prurient explored similar terrain in the 'Worm in the Apple' and 'Whip Enthusiasts' singles (Static Aktion and Bloodlust!, respectively), though the synth tracks here are more 'pro' and less stumbling here, the rhythms locked in and almost song-like. Also, like the collaboration with Kevin Drumm, a lot of the vocals are intoned, deeply, or whispered, the same short fragments reiterated as many as ten times in a track. The most baffling to these ears are the longest two: 'Rose Comet' speaks in riddles, seeming to equate the deaths of Marilyn Monroe ("Monroe's Comet/Burned out") and Adolf Eichmann ("Birkenau/The die is cast"), casting the year of death, 1962, as somehow pivotal (the 'two!' is spit emphatically out of the mouth, contemptuously). References to other Prurient albums are scattered around as well. In 'Rose Comet,' someone is "Tied To Stone" (Adam, perhaps?), while "Domina Milking" mentions "A simple mark," the title of the first Prurient cassette.

The characters who speak throughout are connected as being outsiders, outcasts, and oftentimes the last of their kind. "Doused with cologne/burns/echo across his body" is the fate of the person described in 'Specter Of A Child,' while the narrator in 'Domina Milking' makes this declaration: "I've come to warn you/The mold they used for you is broken/They won't see the likes of you anymore." 'Rose Pillar' pays homage to Monroe, Eichmann, one who is 'tied to stone,' and another who suffered 'demise at 36.' This last one is unclear -- Monroe died at 40, Eichmann at 56. The final track speaks of the character posthumously: "There was an attitude about him/Almost anger/Something wild/Emanating from him/A tightening of his body/Months lengthening into years," a track which sounds like a post-apocalyptic ruin, electronic ash coating every

thing, pervasive explosions in the distance blending into a single continuous crackle of white noise. The words are whispered ominously, several times in a row, a mantra said to hold onto sanity, until finally, the character stands up and shrieks his declaration to the world, which is all gone, before again sitting down and whispering to himself.

Even more than *Cocaine Death*, *The Black Post Society* leaves more fragments and moments open-ended than it can adequately resolve. Although sonically lush and only occasionally harsh, it is also frightfully obscure. Its stated claim to be about 'the depression of not having anything left to hunt' further confuses the issue...while many of the album's grim protagonists allude to an earlier, better time and seem physically drained in the present, the metaphors and impressionistic fragments used to articulate their broken desires can intrigue, but ultimately, cannot lead the listener to any real insights. Sonically, this is one of the best and most fully satisfying (dare I say 'enjoyable'?) Prurient releases to date, but as an emotional statement, it's inscrutable.

A recent 7-inch on the dotdotdot label, titled 'Crossbow,' is the most open-ended yet, offering no art, hideously obscured vocals, and only its track titles to indicate intention (tracks are called 'Aluminum Armor' and 'Yellow Helmet Plume,' two more of Fernow's many imperial/Centurion allusions throughout his project's span). Letting the content go, the sonics are among Fernow's most distinct and original yet. The rock bed of both tracks is a low, crunchy loop made from amp buzzing, mixed with physical sounds reminiscent of picking through trash (comparable to Hum of the Druid's tactile rummaging). Vocals are distorted thickly as if recorded under a blanket, a feeling of living in squalor, alone, stumbling from room to room talking to yourself, sick from your own filth. At one point, a second speaker (possibly one of the credited contributions from Alberich [Kris Lapke]) drones on from far away, like a drowsily-heard TV announcer in the next room. Both sides use a similar loops, though each side breaks off into different moods and velocities. Apart from the yellow/black splatter vinyl and the terse credits on the label, there is no information to work with but the work itself.

Although I'd still call what Fernow does 'Power Electronics' (harsh sounds + declamatory vocals, connected by untraditional compositional structures, rather than improvisation), he is, like many veterans of the form, expanding its parameters to the point that the original definitions might not apply any more. The difference is that Fernow is working in new sonic structures, not just new lyrical terrain. It's easy to point to Whitehouse and their recent interest in Scientology and African genocide, Sutcliffe Jugend's critiques of the PE tough-guy persona, or IRM's obsession with self-mutilation (rather than the outwardly-directed barbarities of yore) as vital points of expansion. While Prurient's structures aren't drastically different from any of these, his working materials (non-harsh synths, non-electronic/physical/junk layers) and pervasive use of tracks used to super-cool the intensity of previous tracks make these albums, as well as his secretive, code-driven language of depression and helplessness, still make each new release a force to be reckoned with on its own terms.

RLW & TITO
Mahlzeit CD
Hinterzimmer / hint 03

The Trans-Industrial Toy Orchestra (TITO) shot well under my radar before this release, with only three releases to their name since 2005. RLW, of course, is more prominent (as a member of P.D., P16.D4., and under his own name), and here he enlists the help of his son, RLW Jr. They are both credited with 'Vocals, flute, violin, body functions, electronics,' while TITO plays 'toys and kitchen tools, electronics, voices.' The theme of the recording, as indicated by the title ('Mahlzeit' being German for 'Meal') is eating, and specifically, the ritual of mealtime.

The structure of the album is consciously strange, alternating tracks from TITO and RLW, each taking a vastly different approach to the topic. RLW (Sr. and Jr.) concentrate on mouth noises, bodily functions (yes, that means farts), and a blood-curdling deep voice (Jr., I'm wagering) intoning something ghastly. Primitively sawed violin (a metaphor for the sawing of meat?) and tootled flute (blowing on hot food?) accompanies the mealtime ritual. My knowledge of German rotted on the vine after high school, so I'm at a loss to understand some of the primary texts at work here, but even without comprehension of TITO's occasional samples of after-dinner conversation (presumably light-hearted and joking, given the tone), their tone is altogether more playful, many of their simple melodies resemble playful classical music; think 'Peter & The Wolf' or 'Till Eulenspiegel.'

The final two tracks feature each 'half' remixing the other. RLW's mix is cavernous, with lots of echo and combined with pervasive fart and chewing noises. TITO's track is more dramatically escalating, and feels more like the '_____ plays ____' equation implied than the RLW's contribution. With TITO's piece, you can more easily hear RLW's source material being re-worked into something new.

The chipboard sleeve is liberally illustrated with an assortment of dining utensils juxtaposed with what appear to be astrological symbols, including a fork that is spearing something that I sincerely hope is a bratwurst. Again, a lack of knowledge of the German language may obscure certain crucial parts of the story, but like many of the great French Musique Concerete albums of yore, it's possible to just enjoy the surreal, disconcerting sounds without knowing what the voices are talking about, just as you could enjoy a meal from a host family whose language you didn't understand without having to know what they're talking about over coffee. Especially recommended to fans of Schimpfluch and/or Raionbashi, and recommended also for people who abandoned RLW after P16.D4., feeling his work to be too quiet/nothing-based.

RJF
Greater Success In Apprehension & Convictions CD
Segerhuva / SEGER 24

A black and white shot of a man with his head torn off, a blood trail smearing across the floor greets you on the cover of this sickening release. Once again from the gentlemen at Segerhuva, an obscure and incredible album nobody has heard of besides a handful of Swedes. Truthfully, this one originally had a much wider impact than that of the previous archival release, the Blood Ov Thee Christ tape, since this originally appeared as an edition of 300 LP on New Terror Now back in 1983.

The album opens up by grabbing the listener and ringing them out with some caustically annoying and repetitive synth sounds, eventually splattered with psychotic and desperate screaming. This will most likely be considered power electronics by today's listener, but this is really just undefined and pure hateful industrial energy, delivering the intensity that Throbbing Gristle got us thirsty for with 'We Hate You Little Girls,' driving it even further into the woods. The second track introduces drum machines to the spectrum, minimal mechanized rhythms with nasty trails of synth scum streaming over the top. There's a bright discomfort to the whole thing, being taken apart under blinding fluorescents and floods, fingers slipping on slick tiles. Is the 'Jügend Dance' a sneer at the expense of youth culture mediocrity, or a maniac's vision of plastic-teen fantasy? Originally the last track on the A side, 'Christmas Laughing' starts with a tinny melody that's immediately obliterated by a nauseating tape manipulated voice while a grinding minimal synth line, ticking rhythm, and bass-like sounds drone on. The maniacal vocals sound like they were recorded with the vocalist freaking out in a separate room far away from the rest of the band. Once again a bright-light fear at work here, tied to a chair waiting for the killer to come back and attend to you. It sounds like a one take/one microphone room recording, which gives it an uncomfortable spontaneity.

'Minimal Brain Function' starts off the original album's B side with another minimal drum machine pattern, a feedback loop, and spoken vocals in English. You can hear him repeat the song title and other creepy things. The nagging presence of the feedback adds to the awkward discomfort, as if he's so focused on explaining the situation in his mind to you, he's forgotten the water's boiling. Disquietingly, the track randomly cuts off. The following track, 'Compulsive Repulsive,' comes in with more minimal drum machine and irritating synth buzzing. The vocals on this one are more angry and drunk than insane. I doubt there is any connection, but this could be seen as the grandfather to the sound of some of the tracks on Wolf Eyes' *Dread* album, with the straightforward drum machine, horrible noise and gruff screaming. Again, quickly cut off, but with a sense that everything had been said.

Next up, we get more grimy synth arpeggiation and vocals, a deeper, more desperate tone to the voice this time, almost like a politician crossed with a dying lounge singer. The dirty undulation of the synth hum keeps the vocals from being entirely clear, and they sound like he's talking into a bucket. The final track of the solitary RJF album has the only human drumming on the album, ultra minimal pounding. Metallic rhythms, primitive synth tones and screamed vocals that sound like German, and I assume they are since the title is 'Zuwiederhandlungen.' A tasteful slight delay on the vocals gives them the extra color of a true maniac. This piece underlines the RJF technique of repetition and duration as torture devices, really an amazing track: primitive, hateful, and immediate.

As usual, you notice the absolute highest level of respect for the material from the Segerhuva team. The attention to true industrial tastes to leave the tape qualities in from the vinyl copy, and not trying to smudge out reality deserves to be praised. The choice of the A5 sleeve and booklet is also perfect, continuing the tradition of the interaction between information presented at that scale and the Noise/avant-whatever connoisseurs' relationship with that object. Hopefully, this will be part of a move in packaging in which the statement 'Includes A5 sleeve' won't evoke nostalgia for days past, but will be part of a current, continuing tradition.

This album is an absolute necessity for any respectable Industrial/Power Electronics library now that it is an obtainable release. (Nick Henry)

RAGLANI
Of Sirens Born CD
Kranky / KRANK 124

This ain't noise...hell, it's ain't even noisy! It's music; pretty, sweet, delicate music, with flutes and nylon-stringed guitars and tapes of birds ca-cawing in trees, and sometimes, the whole thing is so fluttery and dainty and immersive and joyous, you could damn well be forgiven for thinking about the Penguin Café Orchestra. Except, of course, for the eddies of buzzing synth urping out slimy brown and blue streaks of controlled discord. It's pretty, yes, but there are nettles to be found for a hand thrust in too quickly.

Comparisons to Kraut-age patchcord goblins like Klaus Schulze, Vangelis, and Florian Fricke are apt, especially the latter; even before I read the Kraut-referencing press sheet, a first spin had my mind wandering to Popol Vuh's soundtrack to *Aguirre: The Wrath of God*. It's no hyperbole, either; *Sirens* is a humid, hallucinogenic gob of Bufotenine hocked right into your third eye, but it's a mind-melt tempered with the velvety touch of strings and percussion that spin webs of melody and countermelody while weaving through layers of environmental discourse. The watery synth chords create idyllic jungle-scapes and sea villages that hide deceptively violent cadences beneath the surface. Raglani's electronics sometimes crash into the proceedings, like a tidal wave that washes in and destroys your house not out of hate or revenge, but because it is nature, and because it is blind to your wishes. 'The Promise of Wood and Water,' the second track here, comes on so gradually, you won't notice at first that you're being carried out into a riptide and pulled under, if only because the mermaids that have circled you are serenading you with celestial lutes and keening lullabies.

Originally released on a ltd. 100 CDr on Gameboy, it's good to see this release get a larger audience. At only a half hour and change, there's no room for boredom here, though I doubt you'd be bored even if you doubled the playing time, even if that meant playing the first half in reverse.

RICHARD RAMIREZ
Start Again CD
Unrest Productions / unprcd03

The legendary Houston noise icon again proves his never-ending desire to atomize and compartmentalize the component shades and ranges of Noise and use them selectively, creating specific, detailed textures amidst the brutal harmonics and waves. With the literally 20 or more band names at his disposal, each ostensibly with a different 'mission,' it's hard to remember what constitutes a 'Richard Ramirez' release, apart from simply having no collaborative partner.

Start Again's opening track, 'Perverse Methods Laid Bare,' roars to life immediately with volcanic waves of static, a fizzy midrange blast of cascading fuzz broken up with knotty, physical burrs, occasionally dipping into deep-bass crunch textures that sound like they might be triggered from a sampler, or the result of a long loop that comes around only every few minutes. It's not strictly 'Wall Noise' (like his Werewolf Jersusalem project often is), but its intense devotion to texture makes it an easy pick for the wall riders in your life. As with many others in the Houston community, the fetishization of certain frequency ranges, laying deep in the cut to get the meatiest, most snarling frequencies is the real story here, satisfying that deep-in-the-bones ache for MORE and HARDER. Deep in the background, sounds waft in and out that almost resemble pop music or videogame sounds, but it's not your standard 'mutilate this week's pop hit,' just some evocative window dressing in the background.

'Perverse Methods' has its first major downturn occur at 14:00, with a deadening of the original sources, a watery series of transitions leading us — ta da! — back to the original source sounds, for another 7 minutes of penetrating bliss. It starts where it left off, but paradoxically, the process starts over at an even more vicious level. At 18:30, a series of crunching, physical collapsing movements, rise up for some sort of deep and nasty finale. At 20:00, a quick pull-back, a pirouette, and then back into the industrial turbine for an immolating finale. Amazing assurance, natural progression, almost narrative-free but with keen vision in its ability to hold your attention throughout.

'Queer Patrol' is more of a typical Ramirez track title, but it starts in unconventional territory, with dirty ambient made with tape-wrinkled distress beacons that groan forlornly. I kind of love it, but it doesn't last long. A deep, ferocious KICK occurs at 2:30, a great change-up, almost anthemic. The track fills space with more sputtering music (from a shortwave?) in the background, tight loops that resemble horror soundtrack music. It's not necessarily all that harsh, but it is HUGE — the scale on this track is at least a 5-story carpark, if not a full-on skyscraper.

By minute 20, you start to realize that Ramirez is doing some pretty epic battling against the equipment, coaxing some yearning midrange electronic wail that smacks of real sorrow, as if the Queer Patrol in the title weren't just some party society, or even a death squad, but a search-and-rescue unit, combing the scene of an avalanche for a man lost. While not as potent as the opening track, this is a more than worthy back-field track on this long, potent CD. (I could have done without the whooping oscillator sound at the very end, though.)

It's interesting to see Richard step out of his self-imposed CDr and tape ghetto and walk in the realm of the pro-pressed CD. It's obviously a major release from Unrest, who appears to be drawing up sides with this release; as folks rally under their various preferences and styles. A Richard Ramirez CD in 2008 is a clear vote for the precepts of the old guard — nasty, smutty, craven harsh noise, untainted by the post-2002 need for ironic detachment.

REDGLAER
American Masonry CD
Anarchymoon Recordings / anok11CD

Originally released as a 10-inch record with hand-painted chipboard sleeves and color artwork on the back, *American Masonry* sold out quickly during Bob Bellerue's extended criss-cross tour of the United States. The original record was a planet-sized mass of atmospheric density, a feeling like being in the furthest reaches of space, a tactile sense of all of the distant planets pushing their weight on your fragile body while the cold void surrounds you. This CD reissues the original 10-inch tracks, expanding them to their full lengths (they had to be shortened to fit on the vinyl) along with a long third track in a similar style. It's housed in a small chipboard jacket, with a simulation of the original record's painted circles on the cover reproduced in embossed black foil.

Most Redglaer I've heard has been personal and individual, incorporating shriek reed sounds from Bellerue's shenai, treated with oscillators and cardboard speaker rattle, alien junk assemblages that resemble a herd of rats transporting a box full of plastic drumsticks across the kitchen floor. *American Masonry*, by comparison, contains a full-spectrum density unlike the more personal recordings, creating drones of impossibly large volume, ripples from solar flares bouncing off the walls as fidelity alternates between crystal-clear and scratchy like there's a short in the electrical system.

Occasional outbursts threaten to punch the speaker cones out of your already-hurting speakers, with a dynamic range that jars the mind too much to be considered a 'chill out' recording. A superb collection of heavy drones for heavy voiding of the mind.

Redglaer. Photo by Wild Don Lewis

ROMANCE
'Live' 7-inch
Harbinger Sound / HARBINGER 038

Dean Glaister may not be the most outwardly productive noise artist, but for those who've found their way into Romance's discography, there's no ignoring the vibrant, skilled, frantic quality to his proficient work.

As its title just may have you surmising, 'Live' compiles three live performances and adds a vital piece to the Romance puzzle as we all clamour for more new work from this increasingly reclusive artist.

What's immediately apparent is that the qualities of Romance's studio work find their way equally into the live material — there's a lot of contorting electronics whose fractured forms are pried into the work, crisp junk metal hits and abrupt silent interludes further disjointing the pieces and making each set race lustfully from performer to equipment to our eager ears.

The Gateshead set (I believe) has a heavier loop focus, reveling in pristine elements snared and paraded while hustled by a chorus of snarls that jibe and taunt the repeated particles. Newcastle is the restless, most energized set of the three, a greater edginess and overwhelming barrage of cuts and blows evidently causing a malfunction, as the set is extremely short. Meanwhile, Glasgow is comfortable, the performer in his element and in complete control, expertly arranging the most colourful harsh noise pieces into larger bricks to then hurl around dangerously.

With no larger silences or ambient passages to dilute things, this is concentrated, A-grade Romance, to be enjoyed while you can but perhaps in small doses, so as not to shelve this too quickly thinking a newer release is around the corner. (Chris Groves)

DAMION ROMERO
Twins 2LP
Tone Filth / TF40

This double platter of high-octane overtone-singing peers into multiple pools of dispersion and coagulation, of flittering high-tones, and shuddering, naturally built feedback systems, and a wellspring of ultra dense ear-hallucination. At the same time, there's nothing fragile about these Twins — from the monolithic fold-over silkscreen sleeves to the heavy-ass hubcaps within, this record and sits at opposite ends of the bar from *Trilogue de la Mort*. This is a work of heavy industry, finding its nuances in auto yards and dragstrip riots, not snow-capped mountains.

The sound throughout is huge. Side One, the most melodic of the four, resounds like someone multiplied *Four Violins* x 44, but bends blue notes into the bliss — the piece achieves harmony, then discord, again and again, like watching the clouds part and then reform in front of the sun during a high wind, obscuring and exposing the sun 3 or 4 times per minute. Side Two, the closest we come to a 'quiet' side, is still bathed with swirling eddies of feedback coiled around low tones. You can almost doze off here, so get your rest in now, because the back-forty is a real mother.

Side Three starts for all the world like it's *Vincebus Eruptum* night at the local live-band karaoke, Romero's 'electro-acoustic instrument created solely for this recording' showering us with head-in-the-amp guitarmageddon. Things turn ugly seconds later as feedback tones snap their restraining cables, like an amp eating itself to quench the heat, but only making itself louder, hotter, and more violent. Like Romero's legendary self-built auto,
his machines, even the ones used for making sound, sound like they have an overworked motor under the hood constantly trying to turn over, though scads of beautiful, subtle sonic interplay keep resounding. Side Four is built from thick, heaving columns of air and steel that atomize and reform at will, creating a series of metallic causeways forged from the steel scrotum of Richard Serra himself.

While I still slightly prefer Romero's side of the *CALIFORNIA* 10LP box set for its aggressively non-linear assemblage of sounds, Twins walks its linear pathways with a powerful stride. Recommended to all fans of the Theater of Eternal Monster Trucks.

DAMION ROMERO/ZBIGNIEW KARKOWSKI
9 Before 9 CD
Blossoming Noise / BN035CD

This is one of those records that leaves you in a state of paranoia and doubt, and not just because of the sounds. From one little disclaimer on the sleeve ("Some audio playback systems may exhibit signs of stress due to reproduction of this material; high performance stereo equipment is recommended") comes a multitude of skittish thoughts. Wait, was that buzzing intentional? Was that clipping part of the piece? Am I getting the full effect? Am I destroying my speakers by listening to this? Even on a pretty decent 5.1 stereo setup with a subwoofer the size of a small dog, I was getting some pretty weird buzzing from track 1, leading me to think it was probably part of the program. But how will I know? How will I REALLY know? Do I have to be living inside of a fuckin' Large Hadron Collider-sized speaker cone to fully tune these deep-sea frequencies? I guess the only real solution is just to 'wreck small speakers on expensive stereos' and see what happens.

Romero and Karkowski have composed these three tracks (all of them a tidy and symmetrical 18 minutes and 18 seconds) that are almost entirely in the lower register, with only some whispy mid-range feedback ghosts to add deepening shades to the bass-black hues. Track one sounds like an airplane landing right over your house again and again, and induced the most distorting on my stereo. Track two is a never-ending rise and fall of cavernous, subterranean electronic hums, with a compositional framework similar to *Crawl Unit Vs. Silence*, but with a fat rump. It rides over you, free of distortion, like heavy weights rolling across your chest.

Tracks 1 and 2 feel more process-driven — texture studies, if you like — and don't contain that much narrative tension. Track 3 pits the same primordial bass against an agitated high-voltage field that flares angrily in seemingly random patterns. After two tracks of testing a solid speaker system to its limits, this track sounds like it's trying to rip the room, furniture, and human owner, in half. Huge mechanical apparitions appear and disappear on the horizon as the sea roils harder and the clouds thicken. The sheer size of these sounds terrifies; you feel like you're paddling around in the middle of this sea with no land on the horizon in any direction, lighting striking the water in the distance. The track isn't apocalyptic — apart from a quick burst in the last minute, there isn't any real dramatic build-up — but as an evocation of fearsome and treacherous landscapes go, this creates an atmosphere of blind panic every bit as heady as anything in Col. Kurtz's jungle. Top recommendation for the patient and bass-equipped.

SECRET ABUSE/LAZY MAGNET
'Two Steps' / 'Remove the Noose' 7-inch
Callow God / no cat. #

A precise package, one in which two closely-collaborating projects offer contrasting takes on the sort of new romanticism that's all the rage amongst the kiddies. Secret Abuse, who knocked me out most impressively on his IDES tape release, here offers the harsher of the two sides, with chopped chunks of monotone vocals, leading into Hafler Trio-style machine hum. The side ends with a majestic guitar melody over harsh crust, something like the new-ish Emaciator direction. Lazy Magnet is much more serene, quiet and dramatic, but with a strongly panicked undertone. 'Mute Gait' is a useful term for the cinematically surreal, disciplined music on here.

This is a pleasantly enigmatic record, with its symbol-heavy artwork and insert, hand-drawn runic scribbles, and collage layout implying a wider and deeper field than initially imagined, like a view through a keyhole into a Man Ray landscape. 300 copies shouldn't go that fast, but then again, the sooner you get this, the sooner it'll be in your life.

Damion Romero. Photo by Wild Don Lewis

SHIFT
Bulk CD
Silken Tofu/Unrest Productions / slx.10/UNPRCD05

This album from Shift is a complete surprise. It's not traditional Power Electronics or Industrial. It's more or less a 'Noise' album. Of course, deeper listening reveals that this is an architecturally precise investigation of concrete textures and focused blast-furnace sonics. To the casual listener, though, this is going to just sound like 'Wall Noise.' He may very well be on the attack, noting the trend, and having his say. Leave it to Shift to defy expectations and go his own route. It's amusing that the Noise scene is so stagnant that it's shocking when someone doesn't just repeat themselves. That this is outwardly so different from the previous releases I've heard is one of the captivating and admirable aspects. He doesn't display a need for repetition, or a release schedule to maintain 'scene presence.' Albums and statements are released when they make sense, when there is content.

The artwork is gorgeous, with a direct focus on architectural mass, specifically the efficient Brutalist structure the Tricorn Centre. That the Tricorn was a beautifully impenetrable and hated structure that took 9 months to destroy adds quite nicely to the conceptual grounding of the album. As is clear in the album's title, *Bulk*, this is all about weight, slow movements, gradual change, standing ground as long as possible in the face of opposition.

The patient movements within these three near-academic studies are domineering yet soothing. Each track is a slight variation on the furnace-blasted concrete and synth-grit drone. Changes come more as fluctuations of static patterns within a system than immediately obvious dynamics, and tracks go through different shades of intensity, but within a very restricted spectrum. Adjustments definitely take place, but it's the sort of the slight and continual change that you get as your eye moves along a continuous structure, minor imperfections and chaos reveal themselves with more dedicated inspection. I'm selfishly disappointed by the lack of ultra-clear vocals, but if you want high-static death industrial atmospheres, this is perfect. Structurally, the presence of audibly shouted vocals wouldn't make any sense; what's to really be said in a study of density and structure? That said, there are vocals buried amongst the immovable layers — I hear bursts of static with the same pacing and duration as human speech, and to use the voice as a strictly textural device inside this mass of grit and noise is very well considered.

Altogether an intense statement, *Bulk* feels like something that had to be said. I would not recommend this as an entry point into the Shift world; you are much better off with *Unable To Abide The Silence Of The World*. If you are familiar with his work, and are an educated listener, able to understand the details and variety within a thick noise environment, then I encourage you to acquire this beautifully presented release. (Nick Henry)

SICKNESS
Mudlark CD
Self Abuse/Ninth Circle Music / SAD-14/none

This document is absolute pain, scathingly loud and grimly disappointed pain. It's also shockingly beautiful. The collection's title, *Mudlark*, is slang for what could be considered one of the most pathetic ways of life ever: picking bits of junk out of riverbeds to make a few pennies. The project appears focused on things that are seen as the 'lowest' aspects of life and society: killers, misery, destruction, hate. The thing is, even with a focus on these scum-levels of existence, through the onward rush under the 'Scumbag Electronics' banner, Sickness produces some of the most articulate and beautifully refined noise ever. That's the strange dichotomy with Chris Goudreau's Sickness: the shining treasures buried among the filth at the bottom. It's loud, harsh, sharp, dangerous, but it's not junk noise, it's not scum noise, it's focused, sniper-direct, unrelenting in purpose with adrenal clarity and surgical determination.

The car crash-paced cut-up brutality of Sickness doesn't feel like a need for change based on short attention, but more an articulation of a focus that can't help but see every detail. Each moment is a brief segment of a Cubist attempt to document all angles of explosive electronic violence. He's dedicated to explaining crippling pain in as many ways as humanly possible. Sharp, glinting precision and sonic clarity are the base requirement for each composition, constant change with repetition appearing only in brief, carefully applied looping segments; neurological spasms, trapped memory and images, obsessive thoughts, gone with a determined shake of the head.

The subtle sense of space is incredible; you're hyper-blasted with violent emotional flashbacks at a slasher pace bordering on incomprehensible, only to wake up in a cold sweat, with the echoing glimpses of the memory falling away. The brief silences like an empty room, save for a mattress and an empty glass. Then your face is shoved back under the razor-laced freezing water, pummeled from every possible angle.

Until we reach the live track, the only actual respite comes at the beginning of 'Scumbag Electronics Showcase #1,' which is a sample of a guy talking about accidentally killing his sister, followed by about eight minutes of a slightly lower fidelity live attack. The transition from this more leisurely paced track into the almost meditative beginning of 'Blood Memory: 1918' is very well done. It is a more spacious piece than the preceding tracks, with an undulating pace, as opposed to the all-out attacks earlier. The final track, 'Everyone Dies Alone,' is even more patiently sparse and depressing with heavy space, harsh static blasts, uncomfortable breathing sounds, and venomous rasping mixed into the assault.

For a collection of tracks from different releases (a solo 3 x biz-card CDr, 2 splits, a live track, and a comp track), the sense of flow and rapid continuity is impressive. The structural and material unity comprising the pieces is powerful enough that the tracks serve each other well. If you only have enough money for a few noise items, or if you're only interested in releases that matter, having no patience for endless limited editions without a purpose, then this is completely necessary. It's sonically dense and rewarding, saturated with minute details at every level of magnification, the only limit is how deep you can handle going. The presentation is also gorgeous, featuring unflinching personal writings by Goudreau. Skip those three worthless tapes you were about to buy and invest in reality. Get this immediately. (Nick Henry)

SISSY SPACEK
French Record CD
Dual Plover / 5101-11733-2

French Record is sequenced in big, raggedy chunks, kind of a toy box of Spacek styles. The disc starts in agreeably retarded mode, with Wiese and special guest Kevin Drumm totally shredding on some metal guitar licks! (I mean 'retarded' in the most complimentary sense imaginable.) The tin-box distortion and intentionally crap sound makes this totally bonkers intro work perfectly, managing to invoke otherwise-unrelated strains of metal at the same time, as power metal speed-solos and black metal plectrum-burners intertwine in your frontal lobes — I swear, I recognize a few of those licks!

At this point, the band puts its metal codpiece away until later, taking us meanwhile to many other discrete locations. 'Sepsis' sounds like the Spacek of yore, its thrashing, epileptic cutups harkening back to the first record, the 'cat-headed' one. Then, after a bit of squiggle ('Sequins'), we get seven tracks in a row of flappy, blast percussion-driven stumblefuck noise rock with odd sonorities and compromised situations (compare with the 'Poling' 7-inch on Static Aktion and disc two of *California Ax*). Most of the first 'side' (it's a CD, but you know what I'm saying) is taken over by this session, and if you don't watch the tracker on the CD closely, you'd be forgiven for thinking this is all one long piece without CD divisions.

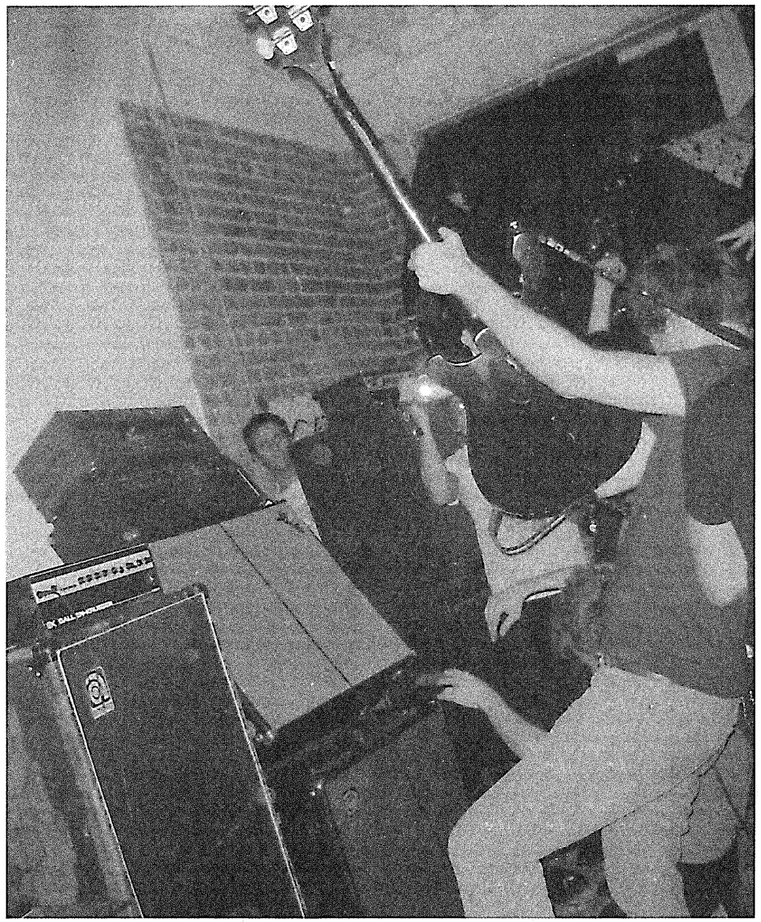
Just as you settle into this particular mode, though, the album's centerpiece, the monolithic 'Really Into The Haters' jars you out of complacency. A junk-noise monsterpiece, 'Haters' attacks and attacks and attacks. And attacks! Remorseless, thundering junk sound, really among of the best (and best-recorded) junk recordings I've heard in a long time; loud, precise, and very metallic.

After some more free-improv in the style of the earlier tracks (this time with Sam Ott, who also played drums on the 'Poling' 7-inch), there's a short collaboration with C. Spencer Yeh, focused mostly on bow-breaking scrabble improv again.

For the finale, Mr. Drumm reprises his role, but this time, the metal riffs are buried in a sea of Big Muff-style ultra-fuzz, alluding back to the start, but only obliquely. It's a grand and head-scratching finale to a grand and head-scratching record. The episodic nature of *French Record* is noteworthy, as most Spacek records so far have dealt primarily in only one facet of the group. As such, this makes a fine intro to the many sides of the band, and is a clear reminder that nobody tells Sissy what to do!

SISSY SPACEK
California Ax 4 x CD
Helicopter / H 50

When released sparingly in an artist's discography, a 4 x CD box set can be a stunningly colossal release. This Sissy Spacek set falls into the lineage of Merzbow's *Metalvelodrome*, K2's *Sexencyclopedia*, C.C.C.C.'s *Early Works*, The New Blockaders' *Gesamtnichtswerk*, and Pan Sonic's *Kesto*. Of course, if Wiese starts going the American Tapes route of releasing tons of 8 x cs box sets and 6 x CDr box sets, the importance of the statement could be diminished, but I don't think that's going to be



Sissy Spacek. Photo by Damion Romero

a problem (though a multi-CD set of all the rare Wiese and Spacek 7-inch material would be great). Another fact that pushes this towards being an anomalously insane release is that most SS releases are 7-inch bursts, and a fair amount of those are one-sided. Basically, this is the most monumentally unexpected Sissy Spacek release possible.

The picturesquely titled first disc, *Tinsel Dripping Ink*, is primarily a series of ultra-buzzer punk noise-scum blasts with unhealthy screaming by the core duo of John Wiese and Corydon Ronnau. Interspersed throughout are remixes by a variety of co-conspirators. Gerritt submits a very textural piece that sounds like slime-thunder through tunnels. Andrew Ortmann/Panicsville provides collaborative materials, as well as remixing with a razor eye for pop horror juxtapositions. His remix 'Index' is actually pretty funny, with cartoon noise blasts and a down-pitched voice reciting an index of Sissy Spacek release titles. For those keeping score, Greg Kelley plays trumpet on a few tracks, but it's basically just another texture in the swarm. Oblivia from Smegma approaches her mix through vinyl manipulation, as would be expected, probably just messing with a SS record and recording the results. The Tom Recchion mix is an atmospheric reworking that gives the spastic burst nature of the SS material room to breathe. Track 18 provides another amusing moment only because it's an unexpectedly epic guitar solo flash supplied by Kevin Drumm amidst the splatters and sighs of the disc. The first disc closes out with a cavernously distant live show at The Smell featuring Shannon Walter on electronics. I assume her contribution is the weird hyperventilating metallic creep sound chugging away between the standard SS blasts. The episodic nature of this discs material keeps it from becoming wearying, especially in the way remixes are interspersed amongst the blast-punk stuff.

Disc Two is titled *Police*, and it seems the overarching concept behind this one is that each track (except track 10) features a different female drummer: Sam Ott, Kate Hall, and Sarah Cake. The sound here is like a slower version of *Changez Les Blockeurs* with a stretched out black and white skeletal version of SS doing instrumental impressions of drummers practicing. I'm not kidding. That isn't some meaningless noise idiot description, that's literally what it sounds like. Really, imagine that, that's what I'm listening to, and it's great. The biggest diversion from the norm happens during the last two tracks, 'New Pillocase,' which is solo Wiese performing a slow cymbal drone, beautifully minimal with a subtle air of menace, and 'Magma Earings Pt. 2,' which feels like a mix of the preceding cymbal piece and slow motion versions of the percussion across the rest of the disc.

The third disc is the monolithic noise assault *Abreq Ad Habra*, with only two tracks. The first is a 40 minute endurance test, with the very Pain Jerk-esque title 'Psychotechnics.' This incarnation is Wiese and Ronnau joined by Damion Romero and Shannon Walter. It's an ultra heavy radio performance that sounds like some long lost Alchemy Records release by a Japanese noise super-group you never knew existed. It's thick harsh noise mayhem, with only Romero's ultra lows cutting through as an identifiable voice, sounding like some sort of huge vehicle parked near the performance space going through different engine modes. Feedback spit, constant high white grinding, crunching mid whirls. Imagine the constant onslaught of Hijokaidan but with a slightly less jagged and screeching approach — I swear, there are Mikawa electronic spurts going off in there. The final track, 'Bongo,' is Wiese on electronics and Ronnau on guitar joined by Danny McClain from Grand Ulena on percussion. This one is another radio session, and it's also a brutally continuous noise attack, lots of high-end shriek and mid-range scraping. Every now and then I think an audience member is vaguely audible. This is very primitive noise, reminds me of some tape I'd dig up and not remember where it came from. Eventually, the first part seems to end, people cheer for a second, and the guitar and what sounds like drum machine become clearer, but still buried under shrieking hell. Things go from feedback attacks to sort of nod off buzzing stares. Definitely a different approach and pace, and I can appreciate it for that, but it doesn't do much for me.

The final disc is called *13-Tet Los Angeles*. This is a piece with a written score by Wiese. The booklet doesn't indicate if each of the two sets are different interpretations of the same piece, or if they are completely different. Basically we get a supergroup of Wiese, Romero, Walter, and David Scott Stone on electronics, Ronnau, Aaron Hemphill, and Jarrett Silberman on guitar, Dean Spunt, Kate Hall, Mitchell Brown, and Tim Koh on percussion, Joseph Hammer on tapes, and finally Giles Miller playing woodwinds that beautifully float over the chaos. This is like taking the split-second shard aspect of SS and expanding it into a gradual orchestral experience, a white and silver grid with blocks lighting up with colors and shapes, electronic blurts, bursts, drones, tone stutters, string bumps, and percussive sprinkles. No heavy waves for the first piece, just undulating patterns. It's with the second that things get heavier; nothing drags out like the sun stare of Disc Three, but it gets into choppy waters.

As is the reliable standard with a Helicopter release, the design of the packaging is instantly classic. Gorgeous silver, white and black tray cards with an amazing typographic DNA structure on the cover. You also get two separate booklets, one of track information, and the other of photo documentation, one image pertinent to each disc. Finally, the discs themselves, white with friendly hand written-looking orange information, beautifully contrasting with the rest of the art. All together, this release is just massive, both conceptually and in execution. One of the best things about this set is the absolute sense of freedom and movement. It goes from hair-whipping speed to liquid undulations; expectations are constantly exceeded, and with each new environment, a sense of discovery is present that makes for invigorating listening. This is a mandatory release for any noise collection. (Nick Henry)

SPINE SCAVENGER
Shackles of Man-Measured Time LP
Troniks / TRO-275

If Noise only exists to you as a dour, home-bound, misanthropically-fueled soundtrack to the Gaspar Noe movie on perpetual loop in your mind, then Spine Scavenger's breakout slab of wax may not ring your bell. For others, though, who can temper the joys of hate and with the occasional joy of joy, the kind of joy that comes in the form of cascading sheets of rainbow electronics and semi-rhythmic tug-of-wars laid down on vintage synths, this record could count as one of a small handful of definitive state-of-the-synth recent statements.

Dilloway's main meat here is tape-delay. Just as Envenomist fills his horn-of-plenty with minor chords and Hive Mind fills his with clouds of TG-Live-at-Air-Gallery heavy oxygen, Spine Scavenger basks in the results of delay is pushed beyond its inventors' original concept and into the realms of near-absurdity. Far from being harsh noise, this album continues a tradition established in the 1970s, the me-and-my-EMS-Putney-against-the-world school of daylight avoidance. Like Klaus Schulze, Edgar Froese, Tangerine Dream, and any number of home-schooled misanthropes now semi-memorialized on Creel Pone, Spine Scavenger is a celebration of ginchy but vibrant synth textures, starting with simple patterns and gradually building into rhythmic permutations of delay, attack, and bombast. This is spacey, progressive, but not particularly harsh (unless you're so fragile that even Synergy causes you to flee the room crying). Like certain MSBR records, *Shackles* is 'heavy ambience' rather than noise, like Beaver & Krause if they lived in the noise-as-mosh-pit era. A good palette-cleanser between more jaw-clenching harsh excursions.

HOWARD STELZER
Bond Inlets CD
Intransitive Recordings / INT030

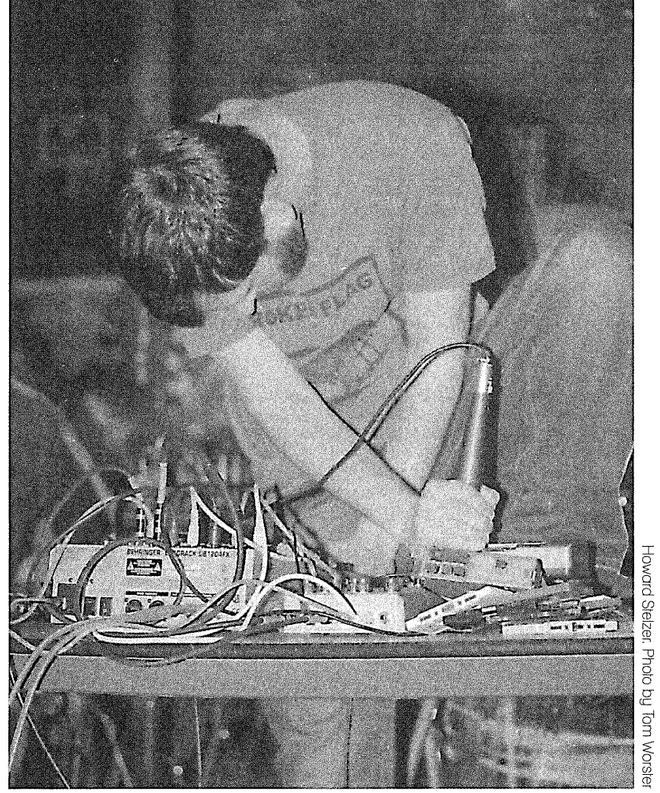
This CD is, arguably, the beginning of Howard Stelzer, Stage III. The first stage included *Stone Blind*, Stelzer's debut CD for his own Intransitive Recordings label, and a similar volume, *Instant Nostalgia*, on Frans de Waard's now-defunct Bake Records label. Here, Stelzer's harnessing of small, portable Walkman cassette players to make experimental sound yielded repetitive, somewhat surface-level results, attempting something that resembles AMK's jumpy collage style, but hindered by an awkward pacing and poor rhythm, held back seemingly by relative inexperience with his primary tools. Stelzer evidently felt that had to change too, because his next round of releases was completely different.

As a duet with Jason Talbot, another noise improviser who ferociously picked and prodded at the innards of a turntable, Stelzer returned with a stripped-down sound entirely based in unprocessed and largely unlayered cassette manipulation, amplified sounds of cassette motors, and other physical manipulations (such as removing the tape doors so that the drives could be manipulated by hand). In comparison with *Stone Blind*'s multi-track overload, the sound here was austere, fidgety, and abrupt, similar in some ways to the early nmperign recordings, quiet but startling. The micro-events weren't just unadorned due to aural preference; they were a form of woodshedding. Stelzer's time in this duo pushed his technique of multi-Walkman manipulation into virtuosic realms, his trademark quick-cuts and zips darting between Talbot's outbursts, working his turntable alternately like Christian Marclay (but faster) and John Cage's 'Cartridge Music' (but noisier). Like a journeyman builder who spends a year working with non-electric tools, Stelzer's 'quiet' period was an intentional challenge, figuratively playing with one arm tied behind his back, but the experiment was transformative to his style. By the time he dipped a toe into the realm of processing and effects, the improvement was noticeable.

Initiated on *This Map Is A Gift* (CDr, Gameboy, 2006) and refined with *Mincing Perfect Words* (3-inch CDr, Chondritic, 2007), the third stage of Stelzer's development came when a fuller, denser sound was introduced, adding echo, reverb, and other thickening agents to the manipulated tapes and motors to create full, lush drones quivering with unconventional timbres and resonances, but still grounded in the techniques learned during both the Stelzer/Talbot years, and also with groups like The BSC, an improvising ensemble from Stelzer's transplanted home of Boston.

Bond Inlets, seemingly conceived as a 'second debut,' was recorded and constructed between 2005 and 2007 and released in 2008 on Stelzer's own Intransitive Reocrdings label. As a way of stating that he was starting over, Stelzer composed *Bond Inlets* by 'dissecting source sounds' from *Stone Blind*, processing them through his the updated equipment and compositional approach. There's a mastery of raw elements on this disc...not technique (though there is that), not clarity (it's deliberately lo-fi throughout), but a clear grasp of the concepts behind adding and subtracting layers, creating appealingly unstable environments, hooking the ear, making wrongness right. The disc is an endless pit of distress beacons, blurry translucent photos layered on top of one another, one indistinct image interacting with another, shadows hiding behind shadows, a maze of charcoal smudge-prints. Stelzer's days working in sonic austerity also gave him an iron-clad grip on timing, miles removed from the awkward juxtapositions on *Stone Blind*. Even the most static drones are girded underneath with metallic scrabbling, insects crawling around in your peripheral vision — it's like there's a colony being built before your eyes, with scuttling, organized swarms all around you, unperturbed by your gaze, while ghostly hammerings of metal echo faintly into a shimmering sky.

The second and final track repeats many of the same elements from the first (based on my revisiting of the *Stone Blind* material, I think that the primary elements here are reworks of that album's third track, 'Explode the Process'), seeming to start from the same starting point as the first (like the four different tracks on The New Blockaders' *TNB Est Mort!*), but adding several more active elements the second time around — more 'playing,' if you will, a climax or resolution, boosting elements that might have been heard faintly, if at all, in the original mix, and letting them run freely, if not frenziedly. The thoroughly arctic finale turns the water/deadwood motif on the cover into a frozen dead zone. In short, truly sublime.



Howard Stelzer. Photo by Tom Worster

SUDDEN INFANT
Psychotic Einzelkind CD
Blossoming Noise / BN036CD

Recently, Joke Lanz's recordings have gone from Noise to noisy, and, between this and his last Blossoming Noise release (2005's *Invocation of the Aural Slave Gods*), from flirting with song structure to SONGS. With the assistance of Family Battle Snake's Bill Kouglias and Christian Weber (Lanz's co-conspirator in WAL), Sudden Infant has turned into a syncopated Industrial terror unit, a la Einsturzende Neubauten or Crash Worship. With a thudding, walking bass line over syncopated junk percussion and Lanz's noise interjections, 'Somniphobia,' the CD's opening track, is outright anthemic; putting it first has to be a deliberate sign to the listener that the *Sidewalk Social Scientist* is building a new kind of lab.

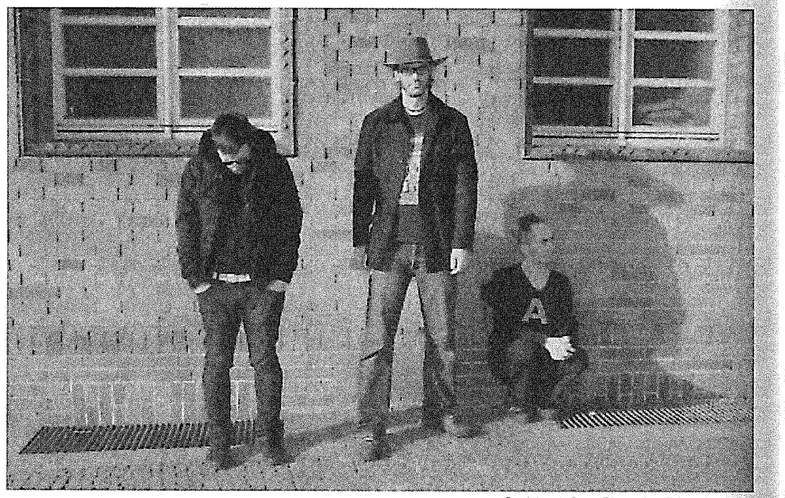
Although there are plenty of meandering, experimental tracks that couldn't be easily sequenced on an Industrial mix tape ('Deep Cuts,' 'Boy In A Wheelchair,' 'Slomono'), the album keeps coming back to rambunctious tracks like 'Tandoori Chicken Scooter III,' 'Beautiful Tile,' and the hilarious 'Trees Are My Friends,' which goes 'There's a tree in front of my house/there's a street in front of my house/there's a street with plenty of dogs/and these dogs ARE PISSING ON MY TREE!', exploding into thunderous percussion, thudding bass, and Lanz's ecstatic babble. In an alternate world, this could have escaped through a wormhole and ended up on the Butthole Surfers' *Rembrandt Pussyhorse* album...it's that crazy and hilarious.

'Dies Irae' is a sludgy blues with Lanz taking the persona of a troll-ish everyman, dissecting the banalities of his everyday life: 'The girl is snoring/my life is so boring!'; 'Head vs. Wall' is strangely funky, and contains a barrage of delay-drenched coughing sounds; the phased bass sounds on 'Bamblood' almost resemble Bootsy Collins, or P-Orridge's bass on 'Tanith.' The *20 Jazz Funk Greats* comparison here is apt — with that album, TG tried something new, to shock with melodies instead of brutalities, couching their experiments in a garb of steel-toed irony (here, the track 'Head vs. Wall' similarly implies violence that never really comes).

Closing the record with an inspired finale, Lanz ends things with 'Zipper Ripper,' a veritable London Symphony Orchestra of zipping and unzipping zippers, performed by all members of the band, all in perfect time with one another. Hilarious and inspiring, and easily replicable at home.

After the album proper, the CD seriously gilds the lily by adding three remixes of album tracks at the end. Z'ev's take on 'Slomono' is full of chiming fequencies and bell-like sonorities — like the original, it doesn't change much during its duration, but unlike the original, it gets points for only being four minutes long instead of ten. Lasse Marhaug's take on 'Tandoori Chicken Scooter III' spins mixer-controlled loops, many of them backwards, and gets noisy only briefly — not exactly a Norse god of thunder move at all, but agreeable at three minutes. Thurston Moore's 'remix' of 'Somniphobia' sounds like he's playing guitar along with a tape of the original track playing in the background, giving the impression of envy at not being invited to the original session.

Unlike his previous baby-steps into song form, *Psychotic Einzelkind* never loses attention. *The Slave Gods* CD often felt like 'song fragments in search of an album,' despite some strong moments, and it never really translated into multiple, feverish



Sudden Infant. Photo by Filipa Raposo

replays. *Einzelkind*, on the other hand, dominates a CD player for the long haul, and could be on your heavy rotation list well into 2010.

THIRD DOOR FROM THE LEFT
Face The Firing Squad LP
Vinyl-On-Demand / VOD 58

It's an unusual occurrence for reference points cited in the promotional literature to come anywhere near to the audio reality, but much was made of the fact that the players in Third Door From The Left (TDFTL) met at a three-way smash of a gig featuring Throbbing Gristle, Cabaret Voltaire, and Rema Rema. Yes, it shows. Not that that's a bad thing of course; for those whose copies of *The Voice Of America* or *D.o.A: The Third and Final Report* have worn thin, fanatics desperate to find another twist in the UK's subterranean Industrial tail will find it with *Face The Firing Squad*. The duo of Raye Caluori and Kevin Thorne blatantly wore their influences on their lapels. The recordings that comprise this set were mostly put to tape around the time that Throbbing Gristle were in the process of terminating their mission, so TDFTL steal away the bedrock of that group's ideas and hides it away in a London bedroom, shedding it of the Lawrence Dupre couture fashion, adding a sheath of dirt and feeding on handouts from the network that was spawned in the altruistic wake of their mentors.

And as much as the 'of a time' approach of both the music and its subject matter helps to date this time capsule, therein also lies the lurid charm of these recordings. Given a modern-day studio makeover, dusted down and buffed up for public consumption, it all sounds a lot more contemporary than it should, with its meandering electronics cut with mumbled vocals (including the obligatory television snippets) found lurking amongst the rhythmic undergrowth. Wrapping it up with vague images of sex, violence (it's the operations of the Yorkshire Ripper that looms largest), psychiatry, crowd control, and military presence in an obscured monochrome mesh helps it to be backtracked a few years.

***Face The Firing Squad* starts like it has been lifted straight from the first Voltaire EP, but that soon changes as it turns into an obsession with the 'Fab Four.' It's with the second side that TG cast their darkest shadow over tracks such as the lengthy opener 'Mission To Kill,' which finds Caluori reading out cut-up newspaper coverage of the Sutcliffe case with shades of creeping repetition and a slowly smouldering tension backdrop, his voice sounding like P-Orridge's lost evil twin. It's only the relative proximity of this group to the original source of these ideas that gives them cultural heft -- anyone attempting this nowadays would surely be laughed from the room.**

Even for a band with such a miniscule discography, this collection isn't complete, as it misses out on both the material predating this collection, and the recordings that came after, such as the unreleased 'Giaour' 7-inch. Maybe VOD will extend its TDFTL reissue program to a second volume that captures the same essence, but it's this first volume that should help rewrite a little history, if only by allowing TDFTL a place in its pages. As well as being the designer behind most of the legendary (mid-'80s) Cause For Concern label's artwork, Thorne also gained more recognition as We Be Echo, who had an album (*Decades*) also released, simultaneously with this, by Vinyl-On-Demand. (Steve Underwood)

ASMUS TIETCHENS
Teils, Teils LP
Swill Radio / Swill Radio 027

At first blush, Tietchens seems to give very little of himself on this one — side one's single track ('Teilmenge 20') is all rhythmic crackle, with just a hint of something beneath. These crackling patterns, which initially suggest the research of occasionally fussy lab-coaters like Pan Sonic testing the air for radon particles, scatter and reform into a host of patterns which are not as abstract as they first appear. It's like watching a cloud of mosquitoes in the air in the middle of summer — as you approach, they scatter and reform with a curious inner logic, like two rotating diamonds throwing multi-faceted light patterns on a wall. As the side progresses, a far-off motionless synth enters, an audio primary color to offset the pointillistic foreground. Everything about this track suggests abstract painting — sounds are deployed methodically, using a rigorous and selective aesthetic process far removed from not only music, but standard improvisational concepts. Not the sort of thing to do dishes to — you really ought to give it your full attention.

Side Two is more sewer pipe-ish, as subterranean water torture competes with pure high-tone beeping, like an alarm clock infiltrating your dream from the 'real' world. Track two ('Ein weiteres Leben geht zu Ende') plays a steady low-end wave against competing frequencies which appear and disappear at less-measured intervals. Track three ('Teilmenge 33A') alternates silence/frenzy at mathematical intervals. Meanwhile, the background again provides a counter-measure, with far-off giant boots clomping down onto soft earth. Hallucinatory swoops and effects enter from the sides, disrupting action like irritants in a Futurist play. The pieces connect in a fierce display of inner logic, but at no point can you clap along with the beat.

While at first appearing detached or clinical, multiple listens reveal an immersive and personal listening experience, like a visit from a close friend who is stand-offish and book-smart, yet obviously really cares for you and thinks about you constantly.

TRERIKSRÖSET
Sexregler CD
Chondritic Sound/Troniks / CH-151/TRO-261

This album isn't exactly 'new,' with the original tape appearing in 2002 and this CD reissue coming out in 2007. That said, I don't buy into the standard of reviewing only hot new product, spewing copy to shift units quickly. In this case, I want to give greater attention and exposure to a release that deserves more thought. This debut by Tommy Carlsson's Treriksröset has had the annoying luck of being a higher press run (something everyone begs for, and it's an intelligent reissue to boot) that seems to have been forgotten simply because there are so many copies, and yet it's not a new Merzbow CD or an ultra-limited 10-minute-window internet luck release. The fact that Carlsson doesn't flood the market with junk and actually takes the effort to reissue pieces underlines one layer of value in this work. Put simply, most debut tapes don't get reissued as an actual CD. When taking reissued versions into account, he's only got four solo releases, and eight split or collaborative releases with Sewer Election. It's very clear that Carlsson doesn't release every meaningless thought and murmur, and that each recording means something.

This is a loud, cassette-textured environment of stuttering tape-muffled noise, dead air radio static, and feedback. It's a beautiful example of how carefully controlled elements and attention to the quality of these elements can yield maximum listening pleasure. Sensitively manipulated and layered textures give the electronic and man-made sources a very natural sense of development. Like watching cloud patterns through grime coated lenses, a haze of dust and exhaust hangs heavily. Noting the title, one realizes there's obviously a very heavy sexual subtext to the proceedings, and this gives the gradually decaying layers a tooth grinding patience, an anticipation, a sentence, a conclusion, freedom.

Throughout the piece, there are surges in volume. These curvaceous protrusions from the structure are something one physically reacts to once acclimated to the static, giving an uncomfortably sensual physicality to the listening experience. At around 34 minutes, a well placed release of squeezing feedback and static tears out of the stuttering noise waves. It's a thoughtful disruption of the structure that allows for enough pressure dispersal (after holding everything to a breaking point for so long) that the listener can start breathing again.

Finally, the layout of the art is tastefully respectful of the material's tape origins, the cover art and interior info both replicating cassette-case scale. The halftone xeroxed aesthetic is always a plus when executed properly. The cover looks like a collage with a woman in thigh highs; no complaints here. And the text tribute printed on the disc and liners is a nice treat for Japanoise fanatics. If you require constant obvious excitement and are oblivious to details, avoid this, because you won't understand it, but if you are interested in textural subtlety and an essay in carefully manipulated elements, I encourage you to get a copy immediately. (Nick Henry)

TRERIKSRÖSET
Venal cs
Utmarken / UTMARKEN 12

Seven years on from *Sexregler* we get *Venal*. True noise remains the focus of the project, a restricted and perfected palette. Structurally, it's almost totally different from *Sexregler*, but you can still sense the halftone-neutralizing, tight-lipped hate that's always surged through these veins. Late nights, cold mornings, red eyes, it's all become a screen. There's a dignified restraint even in the midst of the chaotic electronic flails that gives the material that unmistakable Treriksröset atmosphere. The variety among releases, with the underlying stability and textural recognizability, is a tribute to how incredible this project is. No need to release a million versions of the same record. Make each shot count.

This album is much more active than the *Sexregler* statement. The A side proceedings open with a very live sounding static and feedback attack seen through a tape haze. After a while things get overloaded, and additional layers seem to spill over the top. This is nicely done, as I expected a continuous field, but things are shifted with hot static blinding the feedback and contact junk assault. The phasing between layers is disorienting where the live sensation is smeared out, rising and falling, eventually to be replaced by a closer feedback assault with tape-blasted low end ridges. Eventually a thick haze rears back and feedback slices through, sounding like bending metal and screeching train wheels, tones mistaken for screams, trembling voices held under the surface.

Ominous static fog and buried feedback open Side B. It's a fine detail that it doesn't sound like it's picking up where Side A ended; that always appears sloppy. Get your tape lengths right. Little peaks spark out of the thickness, like red flames tumbling inside the billowing black clouds of a massive industrial fire as it pours into the sky. Hot static and overloaded violence slowly tear out of the deadly smoke, whips uncontrolled and unforgiving. Again, I swear I'm hearing voices. I'm yanked out of a daze as an anti-rhythmic series of heavy dropping and rumbling sounds occur, and a tamed static layer moves in immediately. This grinds and rumbles and is usurped by screeching sheets of feedback. It's incredible how different this side sounds from the first. Whereas that was a more frantic shifting assault, this is a heavy trudge.

It must be stressed again, this is masterful elemental manipulation. I discovered that this recordings is actually live, which I can't understand, since things go through so many incredible changes of texture and heat. Basically the gauntlet has been thrown down for live noise recordings. This document is absolutely essential, and puts most modern noise to shame. (Nick Henry)

TUNNEL CANARY
Jihad LP (+ ltd. 2LP version)
Rundownsun / rundownsun No.44 / 49 for 2LP version)

In general, reissues of unheard and vintage recordings by shadowy 'legends' are hard to hear without preconceptions. Two common traps are to either 1) give the record too much leeway (the ol' 'benefit of the doubt' trick) because nobody was really doing stuff like this then, so who cares if it doesn't stand up, or 2) being overly critical based on modern-day expectations of harshness and density.

***Jihad* cannot be easily trapped by either form of disingenuousness, as it is beyond time, beyond location, and beyond chronological criteria for degrees of sonic violence. It is an unrepressed, animalistic howl into the abyss, one throbbing artery of utterly primitive subhuman caterwaul, a feast of barbarous violence tempered by a center of deep, philosophical contemplation. It's safe to say that few recordings have ever sounded anything like this.**

The big story on this record is the vocals, courtesy one Ebra Ziron. Her limitless collection of howls, roars, declamations, multi-pitch shrieks, and glottal barks put her in strong competition for the throne of Queen Junko, with a spiritual, philosophical stillness that owes an equal debt to Diamanda Galas. All of your favorite female howlers, your Adrises, your Lydias, your Pattys, even your Yokos...they all seem thin and finite up against Ziron's seemingly bottomless well of pain and rage. Behind her, noisy guitar kicks out endless waves of textured noise patterning, with a busy, push-broom bass, similar to Tim Wright's sound on the later DNA tracks, lending an air of unforced calm underneath the tumult. While not fully a 'noise' recording, it's noisy enough to fool your neighbors.

Side One, the studio recording entitled 'Jihad,' is the standout track, an unrepeatable snapshot of human emotion at its most vein-bulgingly present in time. No cloaks of restraint, irony, fatigue, or even blind abandon are possible as the eyes open wide, the tongue is driven to ecstatic syllables (Ziron seems to be channeling several languages, possibly including several Middle Eastern ones), and the mind moves faster than thought possible, until, upon finding the space behind speed and volume, the repressed calm is unleashed, a birthing of the whole of human existence , beyond primal scream 'therapy,' back to a time where the scream was the only currency of the kingdom.

Despite what I said before, it's hard not to listen to this and contextualize these recordings historically, seeing as they take place at the dawn of the '80s. Imagine these anarcho-punks, alienated from the more conventional hardcore punk scene in Vancouver, possessed of a top-notch record collection (possessed of Stapleton levels of hipness), plying their wares on the streets to bemused passers-by and enraged punks who want their flavor of rebellion to be the only on the menu.

And that's just the first side! Side Two's 'Beauty Secrets' is a recording of Tunnel Canary's 'multi-media live performance,' and represents two years of evolution since the recording of Side One's 'Jihad.' Although equally brutal and passionate, there is a lot more space in this recording and it's obviously been recorded in a large hall, which soaks up some of the claustrophobic frequencies that make the studio recording so intense. Vocals

here sound more 'performance art,' and the slight refinement of 'Jihad''s brutal headache doesn't do it any favors.

If you are willing to pay the extra money, the 2LP version features a third side-long recording (side four is blank and features a silkscreen design on its face, a triad of scimitars surrounding the spindle hole that matches the record label design on LP 1), one of the group's earliest recordings, from 1980. 'Live at ECCA 1980' contains further disparity between relatively calm instrumental simmer and Ziron's chased-by-Leatherface hysterics. Neither of the live tracks contains the same spectral, once-in-a-lifetime connection found on 'Jihad,' though, with a track running slightly hotter, and the other cooler.

This mild criticism of sides two and three should not be seen as a caveat to purchase, though, only an acknowledgement of degrees of intensity. Even the lesser material on the later sides thoroughly demolishes anything happening in 1980 or 1983 (or '93 or '03 or '10, for that matter). The three recordings, spaced out over a course of three years, helps us see Tunnel Canary's rapid mutation, its endless reaching for something deeper, more human, and yet more inhuman, going beyond human frailty and unleashing the superhuman primate inside. Such a once-in-a-lifetime document is given a sadly limited, yet appropriately luxurious treatment, with a heavy, quiet vinyl pressing (the needle just seems to melt into the grooves, not even crackling in the run-in groove), slightly oversized cardstock covers, black inner-sleeves, and a gigantic fold-out poster of Ziron and guitarist Aleh Kaheen (now known as Nathan Holiday) in action — a fetish object for all time. One of the best reissues of 2008, and unconditionally recommended to any and all fans of noise, regardless of any self-imposed genre restrictions or desires for 'purity' or any other wasteful excuses.

WHOREBUTCHER
'Fanatic' 7-inch
Bloodlust! / B!060

This short 7-inch is one in the 'Private Series' by Bloodlust!, all on white vinyl with blank white sleeves and minimal information.

The title track is a fiery hit of robust distortion, the occasional low-end rupture set amidst slashing doses of feedback and hissing vocals smeared across the end result. That the vocal performance is so buried (even in comparison to previous Whorebutcher releases) is a hindrance, because while the noise is dirty enough, it's not particularly insightful; the more measured approach evident on Whorebutcher's *Libertine* CDr has gone, the project regressing to somewhat of a more grotesque, filthy formation.

Side B's 'Obsession' loops a quiet chatter and lower drone for a creepy, unrelenting atmosphere which, unlike the first side, I wish were much longer, the slow movements in the sound groping forward ever gradually to display the control missing from Side A. Some vocals would have really set this off, but they enter too late, a brief hit at the end which is again folded into heavy feedback. This rupture causes the sound to die almost immediately, when a suspension and further development of 'Obsession' would have been interesting, had it occurred.

Ultimately, 'Fanatic' is not Whorebutcher's best effort, but it is the first in a long while and about the only one seemingly now available. Avoiding the carefully constructed approach of many contemporary Power Electronics acts gives 'Fanatic' something of a retro feel to it, which may endear or distance it for some curious listeners. (Chris Groves)

JOHN WISE & C. SPENCER YEH
New York / Atlanta CD
Helicopter / H 49

Two cities, two live sets, here's another chapter in the ongoing series of collaborations by these prolific artists. Yeh I am very familiar with, having seen him perform numerous times across the years and having followed his work pretty seriously. Wiese is a little harder to keep track of due to the plethora of ultra-limited boutique edition 7-inch releases, but I grab what I can of the larger editions and catch him live whenever possible. As is usual, a total joy of sound is on display: textural, tonal, sonic ecstasy. The recording quality is intoxicatingly immaculate with its clarity and breadth of signal. Crispy celluloid speck highs to tectonic shrug lows, oftentimes happily inhabiting the same exact moments.

The New York piece opens with what sounds like a barrage of Wiese's mulched concrete shards, setting the spastic pace. Yeh's dry violin taffy textures start sawing themselves across the pixilated bed of sparks and dust. I assume this is a bunch of Wiese's banked magic, mixed with live processing of Yeh signal. At 9:50, Yeh's violin borders on throat-singing tonalities, and a beautifully sacred ritual vibe moves in. I'm not sure how truly improvised this shift is, whether Wiese picked up on what Yeh was doing and intuitively dropped in the mellow chime textures, or if they knew it was going to go this way. Regardless, it's a beautiful experience, eventually shattered by abrupt burping and oral slime.

The Atlanta performance seems to primarily employ Yeh's vocal chirps and clicks as opposed to his string wrangling, sounding like a dying cat cross-phased with a dolphin, among other beastly eruptions. As in the previous track, I assume it's Wiese processing and accenting the Yeh input. Pacing goes from blip events to full-on tumbling bass. Around 18 minutes in, a flurry of Yeh's violin textures build up into a gorgeous wall, backed with jackhammer flicker textures in the distance, just one of the poetic and surreal moments that rise and fall so often in this communication. From 21:00 to the end, we're treated to an engaging drone that builds in textural and temperate intensity, a series of layered phrases on the lights from a dead star, infrared signal on printouts into flames. I would love to have this brief segment extended into a full 50-minute album, but will content myself to the ethereal moment captured.

What I like about these types of textural collaborations is that they can be appreciated as a series of vertical moments or as a linear progression. When a stable section develops, go with it, but allow for diversions and complete changes in direction. Some of the natural and clear sound events remind me of Schimpfluch-Gruppe's detail obsession, but the overall treatment is much more continuous, with the sense of space generated not through extended silences, but through the pointillist nature of the playing and source material. Knowing the spontaneous nature of Wiese's vocabulary, I don't allow myself to get annoyed with the jump-cut chaotic actions, but there are tons of minute textures and brief moments that I would love to hear explored more fully. (As a consolation, they do tend to re-emerge in some new mulched form later.) Acting as a balancing agent, Yeh's presence seems to force Wiese into more meditative spaces and focus in on one thing for awhile, until Wiese inevitably nudges them out just when I'm starting to get comfortable. As usual with a Helicopter release, the layout and typography are staggeringly perfect, with a killer picture of the always photogenic pair on the inside. Strictly from a graphic design standpoint, Wiese is one of the top American designers. Restrained, endlessly inventive, knowing which tiny detail will make a world of difference. His work is on the same level as Masahiko Ohno, though it has much more originality, whereas Ohno is a master of combining different recognizable styles.

I don't consider this an 'essential' release; if you are familiar enough with the vocabulary of each artist, you won't be violently surprised. If you are looking for an 'album' as a statement, I wouldn't go here, but if you're looking for a document of time and place, as well as a perfect representation of two carefully honed artists in a two-headed beast of a collaboration, then this is an excellent investment. Why do you need 80 Evan Parker recordings? Same reason you need this. (Nick Henry)

JOHN WISE & C. SPENCER YEH
Cincinatti CD
DroneDisco / fig.95

JOHN WISE & C. SPENCER YEH
The Void 2 x cs
DroneDisco / fig.94

While sifting through so much pointlessly documented noise, I've started to generate a standard where there had to be explicit meaning and purpose for each sound, bordering on an almost Fernow-like level of narrative clarity. Listening to works by artists like Wiese and Yeh, I'm reminded of The Incapacitants, C.C.C.C., and Hijokaidan, not in an exact sonic congruence, but more in a philosophy. Their aural vocabularies are so developed and personal that an explicit meaning doesn't have to be outlined; the sounds are natural extensions of the artists, and the justification lies in creation. Of course, this honed expression is very special, and not everyone has it, but it is nice to find it in an artist. That's why listening to these two collaborate is so invigorating. With such refined voices and sonic DNA, a combination generates many exciting new mutations. Look at the artwork: it's Wiese and Yeh, some gear, titles, and recording information. They are the meaning.

This series of recordings provides a collection of concise textural fields. Each track has a set of sound elements explored in a focused manner; that which needs to be said is said, and then they moving on to the next problem. A combination of avant academic focus and punk drive works deep in the material. Grit, movement, oral sputtering, noise blur and crack. Recognizable textures emerge, Yeh's deep-in-your-ears mouth pops and slurps, Wiese's tackle-box of acoustic and electronic colors. The excellent stereo separation and attention to spatial dynamics allows each element to exist clearly and in contrast with each other element.

The sequencing of tracks is very carefully considered. After lulling us into an introspective calm with the textural explorations of the first four pieces, they blast the listener with four minutes of balloon-screeching noise. The maturity of the collaboration is clear on track seven, where both voices are audible even though Yeh's revolting sludge-master regurgitations are taking center stage. Wiese knows just how heavily to apply his digital snaps and disruptions without stepping too far. He knows he can be heard and doesn't have to blast at full speed at all times. The unexpectedly spacious 'Swedish Couch' shows that a tasteful amount of reverberation can go a long way. Track eight is exceptionally gross, as is most recent Yeh vocal work, reminding me of a meeting point of sound poetry and guttural goregrind vocals. There are strands of Schimpfluch processes at work, but it's definitely not an imitation, just taking a thread and weaving a new style. The use of silences is worlds away from the Schimpfluch procedures, and functions more in a Wiese manner of brief separations between Noisecore-like blips and blasts of sonic shrapnel. 'Weekend Pass II' is one of the more painful voice attacks, mainly because the combination of vomiting vocals and junk clatter gives the impression that Spencer is puking a bunch of metal into a bucket. As ridiculous many of his utterances are, it's odd that I've never felt they were cartoon-like or forcefully humorous. Surprising 'til the end, the final track is much longer than the others at 6:22. It's a denser and more continuous drone piece, with distant violin cycles, and gritty film projector drone. I'd love a monolithic hour long version of this piece, but I don't think Wiese could survive it.

On a smaller scale production-wise at only 50 copies, the pair makes another appearance on *The Void*, an intensely satisfying double cs in a tall vinyl case. Vinyl cases are one of the best things about fetishistic Noise releases, bringing to mind not only the lineage of Noise packaging, but also the massive scale of old VHS packaging. It also comes with a blank 3-inch CDr, which, while it contains no material, will cause your CD player to make some distressed motor noises trying to play it, like a blast drone version of those Amiga floppy drive songs.

The whole thing is a Halloween night live recording from 2007. Tape one, Side A is like a really mild-mannered Gerogerigegege. Spencer says the titles, followed by the classic Yamanouchi "1-2-3-4!" count off, followed by little blasts of noise, screams, slop sounds, and some gurgles. It's pretty damn funny, and once the first track and the count off sets up the expectations for blasts across the release, you get the confounding 'Cherub Rock,' which is some cute bird sounds and blips. It's sides like this that keep me excited and interested in avant movements; it's funny without being stupid, and legitimately good, not some throw-away junk. On the B side we get a Yeh solo violin piece with a count off, standard gut-tone, dry-dust stretching, familiar material if you explored the Solo Violin series of recordings or have ever seen him live. Next is a Wiese solo called 'Texas Chainsaw Massacre,' which sounds like intense apple-eating and sine beeps. The last two tracks are some violent bird shredding sounds, stumbling, growling and glitch crumbling noises. Sides C and D contain two parts of a longer composition called 'Die Die,' which is sine drone and screeching with debris scattered across the top, eventually proceeding to more classic noise levels of saturation, and then to a heavy factory drone, showing a denser and more extended style of their collaboration. I'd love to hear more works like that. (Nick Henry)

WILT + THE RITA
Werewolf In the Black Space CD
Cipher Productions / (sic 44)

Collaborations never sound as cool in reality as they do in your imagination. Unless the two styles are REALLY compatible, the resultant hubbub that comes from most collaborative processes (you send me your material, I stamp on it in the manner of one crushing grapes into wine, and then hand it back to you for mastering or further stomping) never sounds like either group, or even like much like anything but a bunch of mushy grapes.

This CD is a rarity, a collaborative album that actually works as a true collaboration. Rather than pounding down source sounds into a homogeneous, flavorless paste, McKinlay and Keeler work more like a tag-team, punching in and out of the picture as the moment dictates. Wilt creates spooky, atmospheric dronescapes, while The Rita acts like hired muscle, frequently shoving his way into to the room, busting noses and bruising ribs with a hideous cackle. It's almost like Wilt is acting like a frame around The Rita's column of harsh density, surrounding it with evocative baubles and burbles of dark ambient textures.

Originally released as a c20 (with a limited edition being packaged with an extra bonus c10), Werewolf is all short set-pieces, save for the 10 minute opener ('Dead Wife of Hitchcock') and 12 minute closer (the CD-only bonus track 'The Greatest Death'). Even at five and six minutes each, the tracks seem long, packed with information and density, multiple movements sewn together into mini-suites, augmented by strange loops ('Dead Wife of Hitchcock' has a repeated sound that resembles a robot sneezing) and surprising gestures. The harsh attacks that come courtesy of The Rita are never going to be immersive in the way that an album like *Standing Water* was, but his feedback clusters are evocative and focused on their own merits, small edifices of crunchy feedback laced to song-like track lengths.

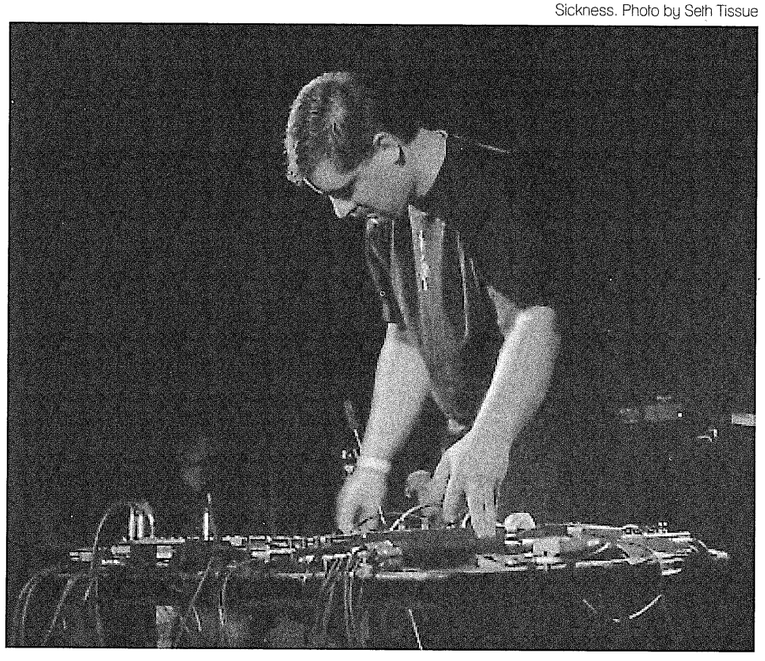
For the ten of you who got the limited edition version and are still wondering if it's worth shelling out the extra ten bucks to get this CD for the unreleased track, I have to say that it is. The Argento-ish track (I guarantee these two bonded over Argento when they first met) has a rising and falling flange sound, keyboards wafting through a watery fog before a blast of trebly noise with waves of bass pulse pushes everything aside. As the track alternates harsh and spooky like peaks and troughs of a sine wave, the track fades into near-silent far off footsteps before a quick edit into a loop of raw sewage rot. Synth chords waft in the background as cars explode in slow-motion in the front -- burning tires, slow surveillance helicopters, smoke that stings the eyes, end of civilization. Collaborations never sound as cool as they do in your imagination. Until now.

WOLF EYES / SICKNESS
There is a Part of Me That You Will Never Know LP
Hospital Productions / HOS-209

It doesn't seem to add up initially...you can't really hear how the two groups would fit together, how Wolf Eyes' atavistic aggro-noise-cum-Industrial rant would work in cahoots with Sickness's high-speed, high-sheen cut-up panzerwelt. Wolf Eyes and Smegma? Sure. Sickness and Slogun? Of course. But here, there just don't seem to be any way to make tab A go into slot B, like the two have different electrical sockets or something. After a little thought, though, it sort of makes sense — both projects have a 100% devotion to pushing their sound, constantly experimenting and tinkering with the essential elements, not content to keep churning out the same album again and again. From that perspective, the idea of two groups who know their style inside and out and are able to dismantle key elements in order to create a mesh, you can see how it might work. The results, however, are not what you'd expect.

Side One ('A Diet of Speed and Beer') reveals the high-contrast murk that Wolf Eyes is capable of producing, reconfigured through Goudreau's precise sonic scalpel. 'Speed' revels in long, shimmering, metallic loops, sounding like the rawest, most basic Ur-frequencies of groups like Organum or early AMM, orbiting in uneven ovals. The loops buoy some mid-range swiggles, but throughout the first 2/3rds of the side, the track shows admirable

Sickness. Photo by Seth Tissue



restraint, resisting the urge to throw a punch. Soon, a slow/fast contrast between two loops creates a disorienting sense of time, like a dream where you can't move your legs as fast as your panicking mind. Wolf Eyes are dragged into Goudreau's shiny-clean cadaver lab, and you can hear their trademark thumps and fuzzy wails, but none of their self-applied mud armor is here. A far-off industrial scene is evoked, really the last thing you'd expect from these two. Nate Young's echoed drumbeats hit again and again, acting as accents, building to a climax. Finally, after we're given just a tablespoon of the multi-dimensional fast-cut hard noise Sickness is known for, a martial drum-beat enters, pushing everything onto a desperate path before three or four quick blasts of delay take the side abruptly out.

Side Two ('47 Polaroids') again starts out slow, pensive and industrial...I hear abstract approximations of street traffic, inner-city ambience, brooding. The roaring metallic outcries, mixed with the beginnings of a paramilitary beat make this side sound more like Wolf Eyes...you can almost hear 'Desert of Glue' about to break out. Strange yelling that sounds like barbarians about to descend upon a village, or possibly dudes in the front row of a Venom reunion show. Sickness puts this all to an end soon, finally taking off his cloak and revealing his executioner togs beneath, with his frantic datakill whiplash revealing itself in the backfield. After taking a quick breath to refuel in a river of deep muck, he unleashes another concentrated attack, ending comically on a gong strike. And then another. And another. The hammering and hammering at the end unifies the two sides. We never get the full-bore attack we'd expect from either party, and the initial reaction isn't arm-waving hysteria, either, but the effect grows in your mind. There's a lot to hang onto in here, and a lot to re-explore on subsequent listenings, as long as you're not stuck with a preconception of what a release.

Each collaboration is different. Some people, especially in the realm of mail collaborations, appear to try to merge their bodies into one gelatinous mess. Others, like the Wilt/Rita collab, work in a sort of tag-team tandem, framing each others best tendencies without actually crossing the streams. This collaboration is more like the one between mother and son in *Santa Sangre* — Sickness uses Wolf Eyes' arms to do his killing for him, but it's still Goudreau's murderous intent that plunges the knife into the chest (or, in the case of Randy Kraft, the serial killer eulogized on this recording, the hand that stuffs the tube-sock into the rectum).

Package is strong and simple — Hospital Productions' trademark 'blurry typewriter' font, with pictures of Randy Kraft on the labels, and a strange, disturbing collage on the cover — the rhythm suggests the collages in the FFH/Prurient *Women in the War* set, though the overlaying of the image on top of one another, as opposed to side-by-side interlacing, give this a more obsessive ickiness to it, like an drawing smudged by tears of rage and excessive manhandling. Thick, clean vinyl, sealed cover (as opposed to fold-over), tarted up from shades to sneakers. An insert explaining Kraft's dirty deeds (and maybe the album participants' interest in the crimes) would have been nice, but, a trip to crimelibrary.com will put it all in perspective just fine.

XX COMMITTEE
Network CD
Impulsy Stetoskopu / 002

If you've read the 'Classic Albums' feature on this, than you already know the back story. Now, thanks to enterprising Polish label Impulsy Stetoskopu, you can hear *Network* in all its Industrial-age glory without all that unnerving Ebay sniping. The disc comes in a digipak reproduction of the original album (one niggling complaint: the red used here is far too bright compared with the luxurious crimson of the original cover), with photos of the musicians and a gravestone inside. The CD has been at least somewhat remastered, and necessarily transferred from a vinyl copy, since it's not really possible to return to the original source tapes (see the interview). The sound has been appreciably brightened, to be sure, but Foust always complained of a 'dead mix' on the original anyway, so it feels like no real crime.

All these fidelity concerns need to be addressed upfront because this is **DETAILED** music, and *Network*'s success or failure hangs on the details. Take 'Prayer Wells,' the fourth track on the CD. It's little more than a rhythmic hammering, sounding like a struck guitar in near-perfect sync with a plodding drum machine. The combination of room tone, microphone placement, and sounds picked up by the tape create a rippling nimbus around every strike, like a strobe-light in a dark room, one flash after another. It's simple but hallucinatory, and it's this type of one-of-a-kind detail that can be won or lost in the delicate process of re-purposing fragile music for a new medium.

Even with 25 years between the first release of this album and this reissue, the music still sounds timeless and unique — I have a hard time tracing the group's influences, and I've sure not heard too many modern folks that are this obsessive in creating genuinely unique atmospheres. Regardless of current opinion, the first draft of anything is seldom good enough to be the final, and the creation of a truly surreal atmosphere or a fully-realized interpretation of your vision does not ever happen in the first take, or even the first twenty. Nor is it appropriate to raise the white flag on a track until you know in your bones and in your throbbing temples that there is no other way the track could be except for this one. *Network* stands proudly against all ephemeral competition, and may sound just as surreal and scandalous in another 25 years time.

JASON ZEH
Heraclitus CD
Crippled Intellect Productions / C.I.P. #22

The liner notes to Zeh's first pro-pressed CD release explain the concept handily: the first two minutes of material are untreated recordings of 'the sounds of a tape recorder/player being held over a candle flame.' The crying, squeaking sounds captured there are utilized and processed throughout the rest of the album, which is quite often academic in tone and atmosphere — if I'd have heard a section of this on a Mills College compilation from the '70s, it would have fit in just perfectly.

At the 12 minute mark, a watery, far-off drone dominates the mix...this is perhaps the point at which the tape players are submerged in water, as well as in an "empty submersion baptismal font," as mentioned in the notes. Through all these changes, though, the original squeaky source material can still be heard and remembered — the spirit of the 'transformative' elements of Musique Concrete lives on. The section builds to a desolate snowstorm ambience before grinding to a halt.

The last section of the disc is more problematic. The notes say this: "The final minutes of the piece were created by dismantling a blank cassette and manually placing the source material on it using a loose record head. The result is long periods of near-silence punctuated by brief blips of slurred sound." It is exactly that. After a fairly active, engaging listen, the disc grinds to a near-halt as the listener sits in near-silence for what feels like a near-eternity, waiting for a little 'nrrrk' sound to barely punctuate the irritating nothingness. Compositionally, it's an audacious move, but without some sort of resolution (it really just dribbles off into the eternal silence of a stopped CD), it's hard to get too excited about sticking with the disc after the first sections.

Zeh's major-format debut is a daring use of the composer's preferred medium, and it follows its love of cassette sounds to its final, logical, grinding conclusion. The final sequence may not be fun, but it's important to the overall concept of tape decay, as the pieces of a functioning tape recorder are gradually abused (candle flame), submerged, and, broken down into nothing more than transparent film and ferric oxide, a decay level akin to trying to walk down the street in a body without bones.

The 'deluxe edition,' should it still be available, is well worth the additional dollars, as it contains all manner of project-appropriate gewgaws, including a loop tape (containing some seriously shaky, wobbly cassette abuse; it seriously sounds like someone is shaking a walkman in a paint mixer), several pieces of un-spooled cassette tape, a small booklet of Zeh's microcosmic, motion-blur xerox artwork, and several buttons, all in a hand-painted/decorated box with an art print and Zeh's signature. It's splattery enough to look like post-American Tapes, but focused enough to sit in the Sidney Janis Gallery.

VARIOUS ARTISTS
'abq=/=lax' 5-way split 7-inch
Anarchymoon, sicksicksick, Ohmni and Hype Machine
split / anok17/sssk-024/Ohm1/hype machine #4

Five-way split/compilation 7-inch, with the two of vinyl sides choosing up turf in the little-known beef (?) between Albuquerque and L.A. ('My airport can beat your airport!' suggests the title). It's a pretty evenly-matched battle. Raven Chacon's opening salvo on the Albuquerque side would be a blue ribbon in any other fair, with its anemic whistling mated to a strong parking-lot-at 3-a.m. ambience, but it still manages to get overtaken by his worthy allies/rivals — no small feat for such a fine little track. Alchemical Burn, a name I wasn't familiar with before hearing this, tags in with a ferocious blast of '50s sci-fi blurt and '80s digital burn, like Solid Eye in a fit of indignant belligerence.

The L.A. side contains few slackers at all. Redglaer's up first, and his track is pretty outstanding. The difference between projects that rely on pedals and those that create processes is instantly apparent at times like this. Processes produce truly raw, abused tones — pedals just change the skin around the object. Bob Bellerue's processes and feedback systems send his sinewaves into the trauma ward — I've never heard sounds that wanted to ESCAPE from their tyrannical master like I do here, though none of these escaping inmates know that their jailer has attached electric shackles to their ankles...they shan't get far. Mark Beyer (who also did the squinchy silkscreened art, and is better known as the guy who did John Zorn's *Spy vs. Spy* album cover) contributes a perfect track — wild balloon squeaks, oscillator garble, all manner of toolbox clatter, and just a pinch of analogue synth in its death-throes. Again, I hate to give credence to idiots who can't see past 1995, but tracks like this make it hard to ignore the distinct possibil

ity that the palette of modern sounds has become self-limited in the past decade or so, and this one-minute track opens a door to all sorts of new possibilities, all of them nasty. George Alan Lederberger shimmers his guitar strings, revebs them, and sculpts them into evocative melodies. This isn't the best thing here — in fact, it's a toss-up between this and Raven Chacon for who gets the unenviable bottom slot, though the short duration makes it a pretty little coda. Not since the halcyon days of *Northern California Audio Document* has a locally-themed 7-inch comp so thoroughly charmed me.

VARIOUS ARTISTS
The Best LP
RRRecords / RRR 750

RRRon Lessard fired his signal flare into the sky, asking noisers of all ages to send in the track (unreleased or no) that they consider their personal best. Of the replies he got, he decided to go with a primarily young crowd, as is his wont. As a result, we get to see five new sailors and one anchor, linked only by their personal opinion on their own best work.

Halflings rain icy shards down on squeaky windshield wipers, like a needle digging into an empty turntable, while the vocalist howls through parched, delay-heavy distortion. I tried killing the bass and boosting the treble for a while, but still have no idea what was on his mind.

The Cathode Terror Secretion finish the job with the best 1:30 on the entire record, 'American Bravado Decimation.' Over a sputtering, metallic backing track that suggests modern Whitehouse trading their djembes for snare drums, the vocals come in with a vengeance, immolating all friends, enemies, competition, and arable farmland. CTS manage to change up their vocal processing, induce horrific stop-start lurches, and conjure all manner of high-speed destruction at a frenzied rate. It feels like walking into a dark gymnasium, expecting a surprise birthday party, but instead getting accidentally 'beaten in' by members of MS-13.

Ichorous keeps things physically grounded, proffering shuddering machine-hack and deep, scratching-the-itch destruction sounds, fancied-up around the edges with just the slightest hints of digital flutter, like smearing a gilt frame with Teflon. It's a little too active to quite fit within the 'Walls' genre straightjacket, and there's too much low-end to make any serious Incapacitants references, but its desire to saturate all the points on the spectrum, layering ripping and tearing metallics underneath a typhoon of mic feedback put this track at least on the level of, say, Testicle Hazard, if not quite the best Golden Serenades works.

The enigmatically-named Is starts in roar mode before doing some truly unusual things with high-pitched feedback, filtering layers for just a split-second at a time, revealing something just behind each layer — a snatch of radio frequency, a far-off voice — like Japanese paper doors, sliding in front of one another, constantly suggesting new ways to arrange old building blocks. The beauty of this one is all in the construction, friends — new blueprints for new ears.

The Brutophilia track is nothing to sneeze at — fast and furious, tight n' shiny — but it lacks personality. I personally thought his track on the *Total Gape* comp was miles better than this. I want to like this, because I liked that track so much, but I feel like something's missing. Perhaps this implies that Brutophilia has already grown by leaps and bounds, already surpassing his best by the time this record came out? One to watch.

The Cherry Point does what he does best, providing the soundtrack to rubbing your eyes really hard until atomized light particles shimmer and flicker behind your eyelids. The Cherry Point is consistently the one to beat for full-saturation distortion-rich harshness. Few working today can refine their one idea and carry into so many different evocations and moods.

Ron's always been behind the young people (insert your preferred pedo-joke here, if you like), and is always looking for the cream of the new crop, making this record an easy sell on a difficult idea. If your wallet says that you can only afford one or two items this month, it can be hard to take the chance on something new when you know that the latest Government Alpha will definitely blow you away. This record brings me back to the thrill of the days (pre-internet, pre-sound samples) when every purchase was a shot in the dark, reminding you that most of those early chances you took opened the doors to all of your favorite things in life. If you hadn't taken those chances then, you'd wouldn't be where you are now, namely reading this stupid rag on the toilet and dreaming of a higher-paying job.

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Höga Nord LP
Segerhuva / SEGER 26

Taking a completely different tack from their first compilation (the 17-track *Sweetness Will Overcome* CD), Segerhuva focused entirely on Sweden this time, and giving each of the four acts a longer than average time slot. It's a good solid number, four. Four horsemen, four corners of the earth, four seasons, four corners of a house foundation. Naturally, the four acts were probably chosen for their differences in styles from one another, and each one stakes out a far corner of the Industrial wasteland.

Bocksholm, arguably the most obscure name on this collection, may also be the best of the four, connecting squarely with a series of metallic hammerings and treatments over simmering, inorganic goop, an amalgam of XX Committee hammering side and Zone Nord bed-ridden side, dirtied up (but not blunted) in the manner that the postmortem age demands.

Dusa seems at first blush to be the wild card in this deck, not particularly harsh or post-mortem, playing scratchy violin over notes and tones and 'ethnic' percussion and tapes. Fear not, though, for once the tapes start crinkling and twisting and the edits get more panicky, the last thing you'll see before your eyes roll back in your head is the spirit of Das Synthetische Mischgewebe, jabbing a bony finger right into your third eye. Lt. Carmel, DSM, early Brume — however you want to dice it up along the splicing block, Dusa rides the rails with the same academic/gutter dichotomy as all the aforementioned groups, splicing tapes with a rusty strop-razor and rearranging them with the precision of a junkie forging his doctor's handwriting.

Niellerade Fallibilisthorstar are already becoming legendary for their *Hålrum* LP/CD on SNSE and a more recent CD salvo on Dystonia EK, so it's no surprise that they don't disappoint here either. Piles of metal are bashed, cymbals struck and rattled, and there's a lot more 'playing' here than on the Bocksholm track, though still conjuring a creaking, shambling golem made of junkyard castoffs as it lumbers into a loudly humming electrical transformer.

Vårtgård's infernal, rotting belches of gritty audio soot always tickle a sicko's sweet spot. It's no surprise that the fathers in charge at Segerhuva would use this project to deliver the death blow. Nor is it a surprise that this slow-building symphony of filthy grind, crackle, and howling white-noise flutter should put fanatics into a state of depressive ecstacy, wallowing in the heaviest teeth-clenching atmospheres, staring a hole into the floor and scratching at the leg of your jeans until the record needle comes up, and the dream is over.

The record looks great (the cover is a woodcut featuring several medieval villagers forcibly dethroning a king; the glossy insert is a bit superfluous, though), and the four projects deliver the goods to the best of their various methods. It's a powerhouse comp — if *Sweetness* will be remembered as a great comp, *Höga Nord* is more likely to be remembered as a great time in Sweden's anti-musical history.

VARIOUS ARTISTS (credited as 'Various Alibis')
Like A Frog In Winter LP/7-inch set
Hospital Productions / HOS-138

The Primo Levi poem in the insert says it all. 'You who live safe/in your warm houses,/you who find, returning to the evening,/hot food and friendly faces'...'Meditate that this came about:/I commend these words to you./Carve them into your hearts/at home, in the street, going to bed, rising;/repeat them to your children,/or may your house fall apart,/may illness impede you,/may your children turn their faces from you.' Levi was speaking about the Holocaust, and the importance of remembering, of considering whether 'this is a woman,/without hair and without name/with no more strength to remember,/her eyes and womb cold/like a frog in winter.'

I don't think this record is specifically about the Holocaust, though. All indications point to Levi's poem is being used by Hospital Productions as a broad metaphor for a seemingly fading time in harsh noise history when the act of making noise was a gesture of negativity, pain, contempt, and suffocating depression. At the time this compilation was being initiated (2004), the whole world seemed to be turning day-glo, primarily at the hands of cities on both ends of the US, Providence, Rhode Island, and San Francisco, California. Dominick Fernow's reaction to the rising tides of positivity was to gather the troops for one last push over the mountain, death or glory. Seen in the cold light of the latter half of the 2000s, this comp doesn't feel as much like a desperate last gasp as it might've, had the scenes in Sweden, Finland, and elsewhere not picked up the slack, reaffirming their commitment to the audio underbelly.

Side One (LP): FFH leads with strong voice sample and low hum, modulating up to mid-range keening. It's reliably dirty, but a bit more active than I'm used to in Dunn's work. I'm thinking this is an early track, before he pared down his sound and approach even more. A Fail Association (one of the now-departed acts on this comp) offers big distortion and not much movement, save for some fluttering ghasts in the background. Great boulders of slow-motion tumbling, without much of the breakneck style I associate with this project. Immaculate:Grotesque pull back the usual crushing wall to offer something more synth-y and granular, coated with layers of bubbling oil and streaming alpha waves. Gutted, simmering frustration that

made me want to revisit the I:G catalog as soon as the record was finished. Cleanse's track is a porous chunk of wall-distort, vocals heavy on both echo and low-end bass crunch. I still have a hard time thinking of this as Power Electronics — it's more like slow motion harsh noise, or less bedridden death industrial. Vocals whisper menacingly and smothered yells occasionally surface. Pedestrian Deposit's track might date from the period when he recorded the *Morose* cassette, as it shares that tape's Harsh Noise-worshipping style, not the technique-heavy Pedestrian Deposit I normally think of. Just good, ripping, vein-bulging hatefulness. Makes time go slow in a good way. Chrysalis contributes an absurdly short track screeching pedal gymnastics loaded with brittle walls of nastiness and unrestrained feedback wails. Like the double 7-inch reviewed elsewhere in this issue, Ahlzegailzehguh plays within a nasty, mid-range fidelity, delivering a pummeling track that doesn't call attention to its own considerable talents. Next is Habeeb, a project that I think is on hold or no longer exists (last tape I saw dates from '06). I hear a sequenced bass line beneath the intentionally dodgy recording fidelity, while flecks of high-pitched shearing metallics, loops, and obscured vocal yawps spice up the stew. The panicky tone of the vocals is especially interesting and unexpected. This is a distinctive track...I wonder what ever happened to this project? Craniopagus take us out of Side One with mud-crusted tape sounds and fluttery dustings of feedback, erupting into glittering suffocation with the vocals. It's good, but the pacing is kind of off, a surprise considering that it is such a short track. This is the first track on this comp not to make much of an impression — a shame, as I normally expect a lot from this project.

Side Two (LP): **Alberich (formerly Black Alberich) stars off with DEEP lows, crackles, and Mother Savage-style ultra-saturation of tone and range, but with a seething restraint seldom seen on MSNP compilations. Not much happens, but your attention somehow stays focused. Steely and disciplined. Bereft is all pig-nosed and ill-tempered, with mean distortion to match the pushy vocals. The first verse doesn't command much attention — very second-wave hardcore — but the reptilian processing on the second verse makes my skin crawl — one point to you, sir. Ultimately, the track is hit/miss. The title of Barrikad's track is 'Social Gender Patterns Emerge...' Yes, with the ellipses. The senior thesis-sounding title won't prepare you for the decidedly un-fussy track, though, which has the qualities of a clanking, metallic, robotic can-opener filled with pinballs. The higher fidelity here is another surprise (I remember the side of the split 10-inch on Segerhuva to be a LOT filthier), kind of a palette-cleanser after all the dirt and woe we've heard so far. Comparable to a slower Putrefier, maybe.**

Prurient's 'Masters of AIDS' is really great, displaying a level of quality every bit the equal to his contribution to the *Prisoners of Sex* 4-way comp, but at just over a minute long, is barely present enough to get started. It's well worth replaying, though; it's industrial as fuck, free of affect (or fidelity), short, a worship of the grottier things in life. Could easily stand two more minutes of it. Sewer Election's track starts with whines floating out above heavy metal walls and textbook crunching patterns. 100% guaranteed no new moves! Precise and virtuosic without calling attention to the fact with 'flashy' gestures or movements. Every chirrup, whoop, and modulation arrives perfectly. Nice two-channel split action, too. Very fine, very fine, but a bit reverent overall. Panicsville sublimates his more colorful stylings to better mesh with the tone of this comp, unloading a bucket of slate-gray synth phlegm and mechanistic whine. The atmosphere is distinct here, clinical like a hospital, but tainted at its core, like... well, a hospital. Excellent track! Filthy Turd, despite a name that would suggest thuggish mindlessness, turns out another nuanced (if shrill) track, a Blod-like acid bath with a minor-key undertow and mysterious doings hiding deep inside the mix. Omei is another project from Chris Goudreau of Sickness, using 'Dark Ambient' music as its template. The shimmering metallic loops and sounds here sounded very familiar after hearing similar sonorities on the Sickness/Wolf Eyes collaboration LP...perhaps cut from the same sessions? The Seven Arts ends this side on a strange tone. The track is solid, heavy Power Electronics, but the vocals are...well... different. Kind of sounds like a pirate, or Popeye or something! It works, actually, but you tend to alternate between nodding along and smirking a bit. "We are hookers and street corner addicts/Street corner preachers! Crouching in alleys!" Arrr, matey, in alleys, I say! It's a great blast, and certainly a new approach, as well as a strong end to the side.

Side 3 (7-inch): **Hospital label-specific act Age of Enlightenment starts the side with some FFH-ish rougness, and a noticeably louder mix on the 7-inch than the LP. Mark Solotroff steps away from Bloodyminded and his other bands to do the solo style that show-goers in the Midwest have seen many times. One voice and a generous handful of microphones and amps, all feeding back against each other. A claustrophobic, nervous sound, like the proverbial cat in a roomful of rocking chairs, the fuzzy waves of mic feedback pushing down on you, oppressive and unnerving. Repeated chant of the word "impress" starts the track. Other words are added, but I can't decipher them. A strong, unique sound that breaks with some of the standard approaches heard so far. The side ends with Whorebutcher's blown-out mortar shells producing underground tremors and rainbow feedback. Chest-punch bass and high distress signals. PE without voice. Damned impressive.**

Side 4 (7-inch): **Climax Denial in the lead with the delightfully-named track 'Leghumper.' Fizzling shortwave static drizzled over a thin synth gruel. Chirps, hints, whispers, come-hither talk that is impossible to decipher. Excellent but very short. The under-heard Stegm project unleashes a track that sounds like it might have been recorded circa the legendary *Sugar Shower* CDr/LP, vocals possibly by Dom Fernow. The track is all burning, single-note synth sustain, minimal ornamentations deployed with the steely gaze of a confidence trickster. A+. The final track is by a band I've got no info on, Burden. Two minutes and thirty seconds of blizzard snow. Rise. Fall. An hour-long blackened fantasy of ash and soot and seething contempt winds down into silence.**

For such a long and sprawling compilation, it's astonishing just how many top-notch and satisfying tracks there are here. The brevity of each individual track is a blessing and a curse — on one hand, the clip at which acts climb onto and leave the stage is so speedy, it's hard to express annoyance at even your least favorite track here. Of course, it's a curse when you're just getting into a track when it is suddenly cut off, its best convergences seemingly stranded on the other side of the 'stop' button. I don't know that the original conceit of this project is all that valid anymore, either: there's plenty of great, negative filth happening all over the world, but if Fernow and Hospital want to toss four more sides of misery and degradation onto the fire, who am I to stop him? An excellent, beautifully sequenced and selected compilation, more than worthy of your time and turntable.

VARIOUS ARTISTS
AM500
(19 x CDr/1 x DVDr/ 1 x cassette/1 x 1-sided 7" box set)
American Tapes

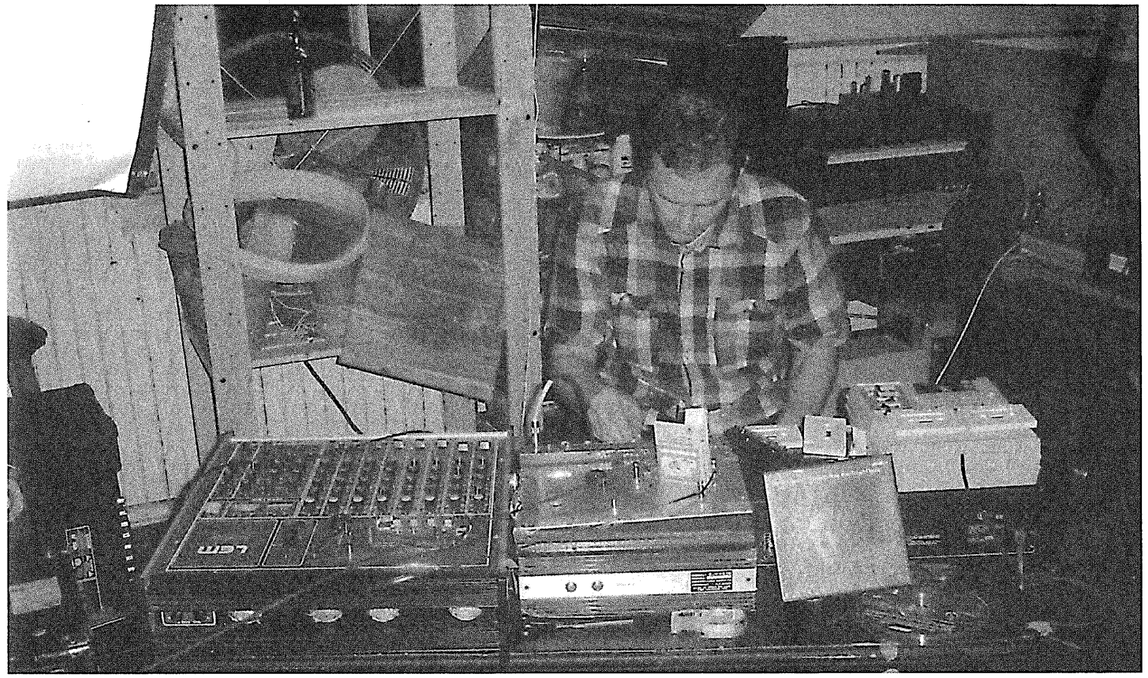
Only a truly unique individual could pull off a project of the American Tapes 500 box's scope. John Olson, American hero of Midwest noise, is such an individual. Even by Noise standards, this is a daunting amount of material to sift though. While I have piles of individual American Tapes releases, there is something more to this box than just...a mountain of junk. The material presented here, all Olson-related, is, for the most part, top-notch in selection and quality and a fantastic overview of this prolific label and the deranged sounds that lie therein. With such a constant barrage of material, it's easy to forget how exciting the actual music on these artifacts is. Heavy on the content, this box serves as a statement that few contemporary peers can match.

Disc one begins with the subtle creep of Graveyards. Graveyards' sound is consistent throughout their recordings. There's always a slow hiss in the background. Here, Olson explores his acoustic 'free jazz' tendencies. Olson plays saxophone exclusively here, along with percussion and bowed upright bass as accompaniment. Per usual, the trio explore the tiny moments in between notes. It's almost more about the space than the notes themselves. This first disc is slow entry. There are passages of complete silence and few 'events,' yet the rewards are apparent directly. The second track on the disc begins in a more maximal tone, with Olson riffing free. While acoustic 'jazz' has only occasionally been seen on the American Tapes label (aside from Graveyards, I can only think of Greg Kelley in the last few years of the label), Graveyards is strongly represented throughout the box.

Next up is Olson in his Spykes incarnation, which is basically cracked solo electronics. The American Tapes Spykes LP, released around the first No Fun Fest, remains a personal fave. This is the kind of music Olson and American Tapes are known for, and this disc is an example of his singular vision within the confines of rewired electric fry. For whatever reason, Spykes is somehow Olson's most consistent incarnation. Spykes usually seems exceptionally focused for homemade scrawl. This disc is intense right off the bat and doesn't let up for a moment. It sounds like being caught in a slowly pulsing electrical storm. Spykes at times is as damaged as anyone working within a similar medium, yet when it gets slow and droney, my eyes tend to roll in the back of my head, in a good way, like falling off a cliff when you know you're dreaming. My only complaint is the disc is short! But there's more Spykes to come.

Graveyards return for the third disc with their metallic shimmer of minimal jazz drone. Iconographies aside, Graveyards do induce a solid menace, like the moments of anticipation before a horror. The bowed strings almost echo chamber music at times, like if you took a malnourished Pablo Casals and chained him up in a dungeon. While listening, the radiator in my living room occasionally spurted out steam and sounded perfectly in line with the musical agenda. It also occurs to me that there's something almost lonely about Graveyards. Its tone is specifically bleak. There is very little celebration; it's more of an existential mourning. Death chimes sound off in the distance.

Spykes returns for a more sinister dose of electro frequencies and monolithic death boat beats. This first track features real minimal damage at first, yet it grows steadily more intense over several min



Aaron Dilloway. Photo by Bill Kouligas

utes as Olson patches into whatever alien dimension he channels these sounds. *Moonlight in Vermont* by Emil Beaulieau comes to mind while listening to this recording in its purity of pitch, which makes sense when considering that I first got that particular CDr at a Wolf Eyes/Lightning Bolt/Emil show a few years back. Track two begins with room sounds and shuffling. This is Olson's world; we're in his room with him as it's created. Here is the heart of the beast, beating away with dark tones. You have to image yourself as a fly on the wall, as there's just no one around for miles. This track's dense tones and sputtering sporadic rhythms are subtle yet overwhelming. Truly, this is among the best stuff here.

Dead Machines is Olson's duo with his wife Tovah, formerly of Wooden Wand. Starting out with low tonal horn and sloping electronics, there's a real symmetry between the acoustic and electronic here. Dead Machines recordings can pretty much run the gamut of moods. This one is a kind of slow slither, akin to Graveyards in tone, Olson bleating out prolonged saxophone wails while Tovah wraps it up with layers of electronic fabric. Things remain sparse as the pair explores their midnight poetry. Now five discs in, it's apparent that Olson's work as a whole has a much more spacious and removed quality than his public image as 'noise party guy' suggests. There's something desperate here, a longing, a search. Dead Machines continue on that path with this disc, and it's unique stuff in the canon. Track two opens with a denser drone and quickly establishes itself as present and in the foreground. Third track features the kind of keyboard-led Eno drone that spiritual kinsman like Religious Knives used to be known for. All along there is junk/noise/hiss in the distance, random electronic sounds punctuating the drones. Are there points along the way that perhaps can be edited out for quality's sake? Sure, but that's not the point. It's about spontaneous creation and the journey to where experiments or trial and error gel.

Disc six is credited to Local Disorder/Handicapper Horns. Here's where the NOISE really comes in, and at this point in the set, it's about fuckin' time. Not sure who's involved in the sounds here, but if I had to guess, it sounds like Dilloway and Olson. This Local Disorder disc features large, dark, tonal drones with chopped up waves of static. This is a more aggressive threat here. It reminds me of the Miscarriage album on American Tapes, another Olson stab of evil. But back to this, holy shit! Sheer evil storms of drone, threatening menace worthy of Power Electronics greatness, this massive heap of sound is amazing. Waves of sounds, coming at you, the brakes are cut, killer. The air horns are going off, no one knows what the fuck is going on. Michigan is frozen. Handicapper Horns, meanwhile, is a horn duo, Olson and...somebody? This is pretty straight improv, delayed horn work, almost Ayler-like in its search for freedom. The jazz is strong here, if a tad long-winded, but then again, such is the nature of Free Jazz itself.

Solvent People inhabit disc seven, and again, I have no idea who's involved here, but it starts out with dark static. Slow wave electro-burn. Again present is the room sound. The actual sound of the room plays as much a part in this music as any source sound. Solvent People sound is pure electronics, lightning being broken and falling apart. Cracked wires, things phasing and distorting, pure tones all play essential roles. This is brain fry, the sound of controlled madness. Like witnessing the final moments of an internal computer crash, Solvent People are deteriorated junk-tronix. This is what's left after technology finally crashes. Nothing left to do but watch the power lines spark on the pavement. Sine waves turning inside and refracting until there's nothing left but the opening dark static.

Disc eight is credited to Full Scales, which is analog solo Olson, total wall of noise, harsh sound. This is more evil, pulsing full-on soundfuck maximal drone of the highest order. All of a sudden, the noise dissipates and a single tonal beam emerges. All of a sudden, the drone is pure and white as if the sky is opening up. This is clearly Olson's most streamlined pure drone sound. There actually is little reference point with any of Olson's work that I've ever heard. This continues for a while in pure bliss-out mode. Track three returns with the controlled electronics burn. Nothing nice following the drone, but mean in a good way.

Dead Machines return for disc nine in minimal jazz mode once again. At this point, things are total kitchen sink on this one. A jiggling, spurting mess of gluttonous sound, this disc is fractured, everything manipulated and torn, falling apart, eventually devolving into swirling horns and electronics mess. For whatever reason, this disc doesn't quite gel with me. So I will move on.

Dead Comet Alive is yet another Olson solo moniker, and again it's strained electronics patched together and randomly falling apart. The opening seems random, squiggling around, looking for something to hang onto. This particular disc seems lacking in focus and tossed off. I was excited, as a Dead Comet Alive side of a split cassette with Graveyards on American Tapes is one of my most cherished tapes. Alas, not everything here can be of equal quality, and this disc is on the lower end of the enjoyable spectrum, for me at least.

Synth Jerk Shop is what's credited to disc eleven. Synth drone noise, stoned one-note excursions.

Variations on tonal excess, analog style. Track two is a dark analog drone worthy of evil spirits. Track three sounds like a three-year-old just figured out what a keyboard is. Totally devolved. Next is Demoon Skirt, which I have no idea what it is... Five minutes into the disc, we're left in a deep drone with some metal sounds in the background. This so far is the most distant, oddly cold and industrial-sounding material so far. Track two is more present-sounding, but still a miserable mood of dark early '90s-sounding noise. There's an almost field recording quality to the sounds, which are surprisingly organized and composed for a project I've never even heard of. Things break down to a sputtering torrent of strange room-sound junk collages. I don't think this would be out of place on Mother Savage if that were any help — it's evil-sounding stuff.

For disc 13, we don't know what it is. It's labeled only as '?' I would have to assume that Olson himself has no idea what this is. But god bless him, whatever this is fits right in line with the box or homemade basement darkness. Just a wall of static and buzz, feedback reverberating through the walls of the dungeon is what's found here. Each track begins with looped dialogue from god knows where. By track four, things fall apart to a flanged noise that rises and falls. The basic building block revealed. Sounds like a muted buzz saw that's not actually cutting anything.

Disc 14 is collaboration between Olson, Aaron Dilloway and Lambsbread. I have absolutely no ear for Zac Davis' guitar playing, so I'm just going to move on.

Track 15 is recordings of Olson talking about getting Dennis Tyfus to the airport and other such nonsense. While this may sound completely useless, it does help take the listener directly into Olson world. These are the people he knows, the people he drinks with, and, of course, the stoned humor of being...Wolf Eyes. You can hear Nate Young, Mike Connelly, and Tovah Olson talking nonsense as well. While not as good as the Wolf Eyes 'on-stage banter' CDr (*Live at Banfields East*, AM383), this is as close as yr gonna get to what Wolf Eyes tour is like between sets. Goofin' indeed.

Next we have a disc attributed to Noise Complaint, which sounds like backwards loops of the sounds after a gig. Track three is where the noise comes in. I've heard that this recording was made in Thurston Moore's basement and was an improvised jam between Thurston, Wolf Eyes and Hair Police which was busted up by the local cops. This could be that recording as there are drums present, but things are nowhere near the intense noise slam one would associate with a true collaboration of that caliber. You can hear Olson on sax and the drums and bass, but that's about it. The sound quality is typically crappy, but even more removed than most. An interesting archival rehearsal, for sure, but not the best material on this set.

Moving on, we have Sound Poetry at Basket Lisa's, which is exactly what it sounds like. Sound Poetry open-mic in Michigan, grunts and vocal strangeness abound. A disc of mostly blabber faux-beat scum mic puke, although track three sounds like Graveyards. The whole thing reminds me of Northampton, Massachusetts. I think this disc shows Olson's wider aesthetic palate to many forms of experimental movements, from Dada to Fluxus and beyond to private press folk and psychedelic music, far beyond the realms of noise.

Disc 18 is credited to Basket Case, and is a multi-tonal locked-in electronics and sax workout of the dark variety. Out of anything here, it's the most similar to Wolf Eyes with its industrial rhythmic pound. As a late entry here, it's on par with the best of the box. We have beats and dark electronics and the best saxophone performance by Olson yet, with low stretched wails combining perfectly with the web of steady rhythms. The music climbs to an almost frenzied height as the drums pound faster in a disturbing tension. When the tension quells, it comes into drone worthy of the forefathers but with a more sinister lean. Track two on this disc is a live performance and sounds like an intense session of stretched-out free jazz and drone warp.

The final disc on this box belongs to Universal Indians, Olson's pre-Wolf Eyes spazz noise unit. This was music in the era of Harry Pussy and the reemergence of Charles Gayle and other free jazz heroes. There's something to be said for the pure frantic energy of this recording, the drums and guitar just go for it in the post-punk free rock days of the nineties. There is also the requisite weirdo electronics and homemade instrument racket and a call mid-set to get some pot. It's a fitting finale, as it shows the first chapter last.

After all of this, the one-sided 7-inch is dramatically refreshing, with short, effective bouts from Graveyards, Birth Refusal, Dead Machines, and Waves, a nice end-cap to the set. The DVD features a few Dead Machines sets, but the real highlight is a solo Olson performance in a school; after the set he fields a Q & A with some mind-blown students.

As for the tape... I'll leave that a mystery.
(Steve Lowenthal)

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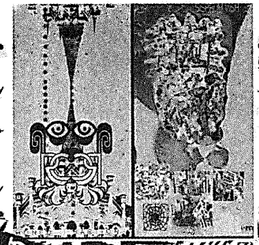

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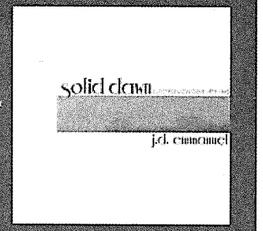

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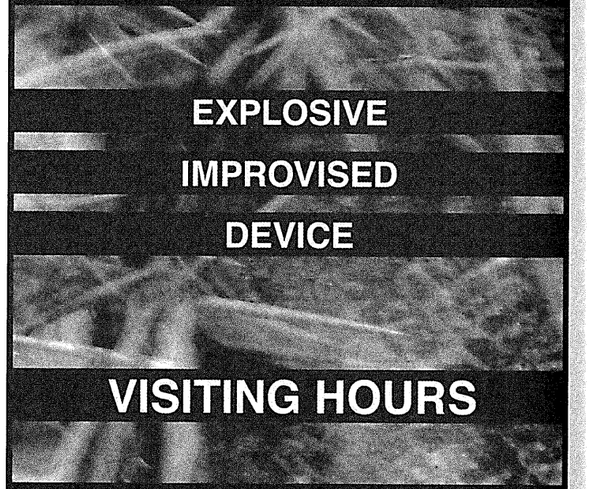

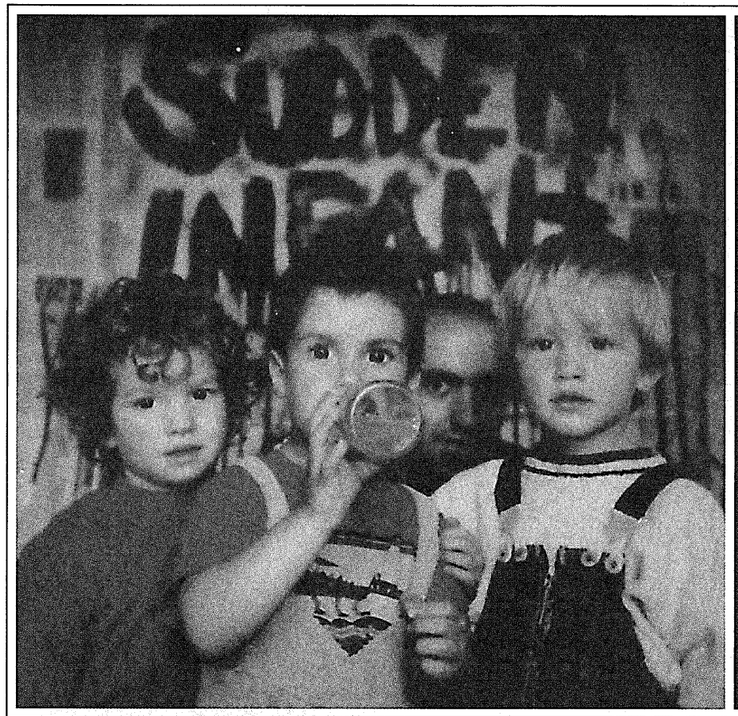

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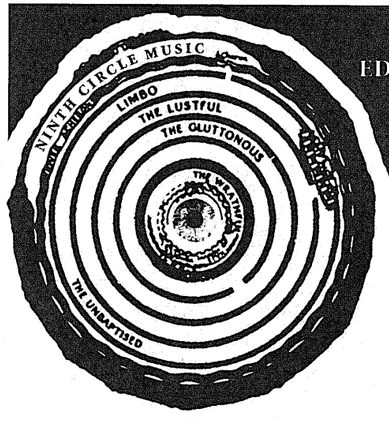

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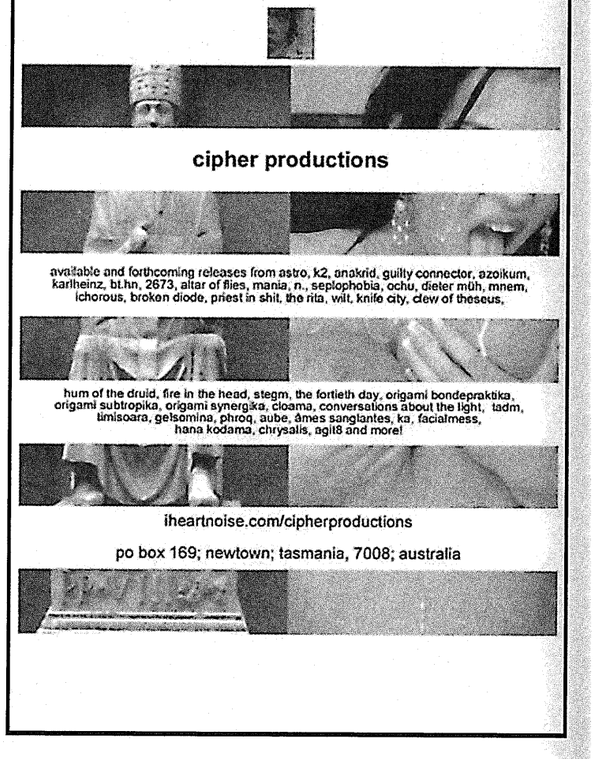
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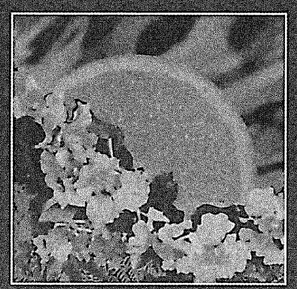

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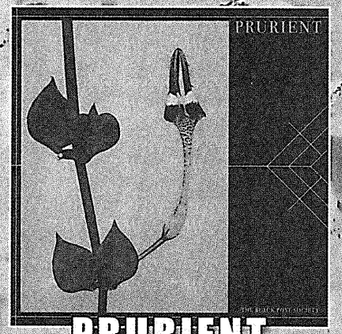

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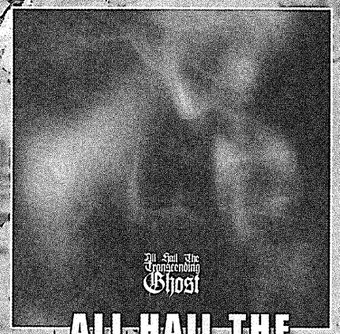

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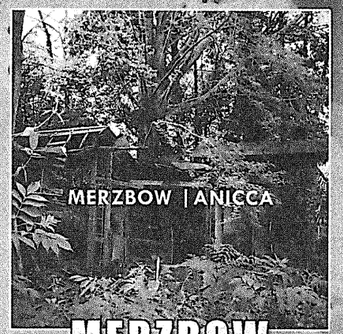

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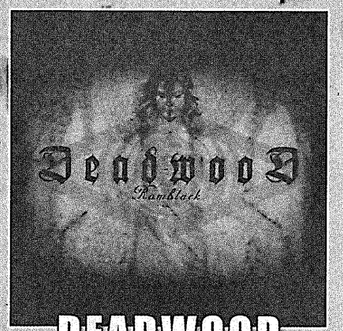

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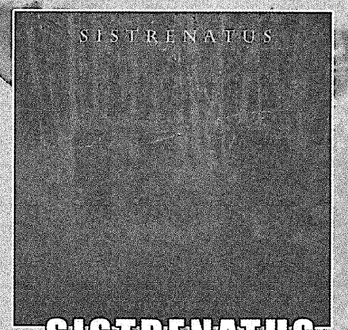

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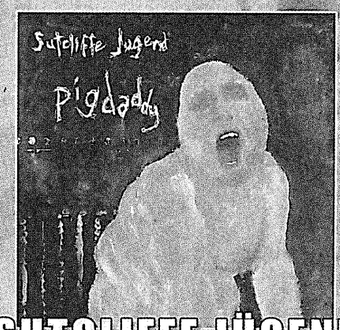

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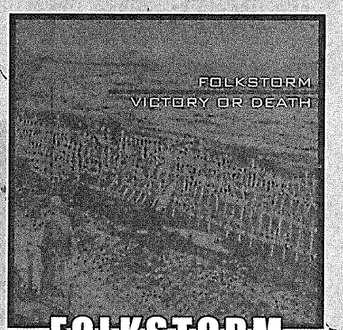

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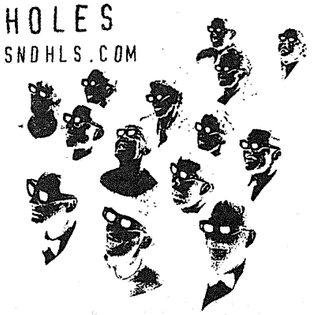

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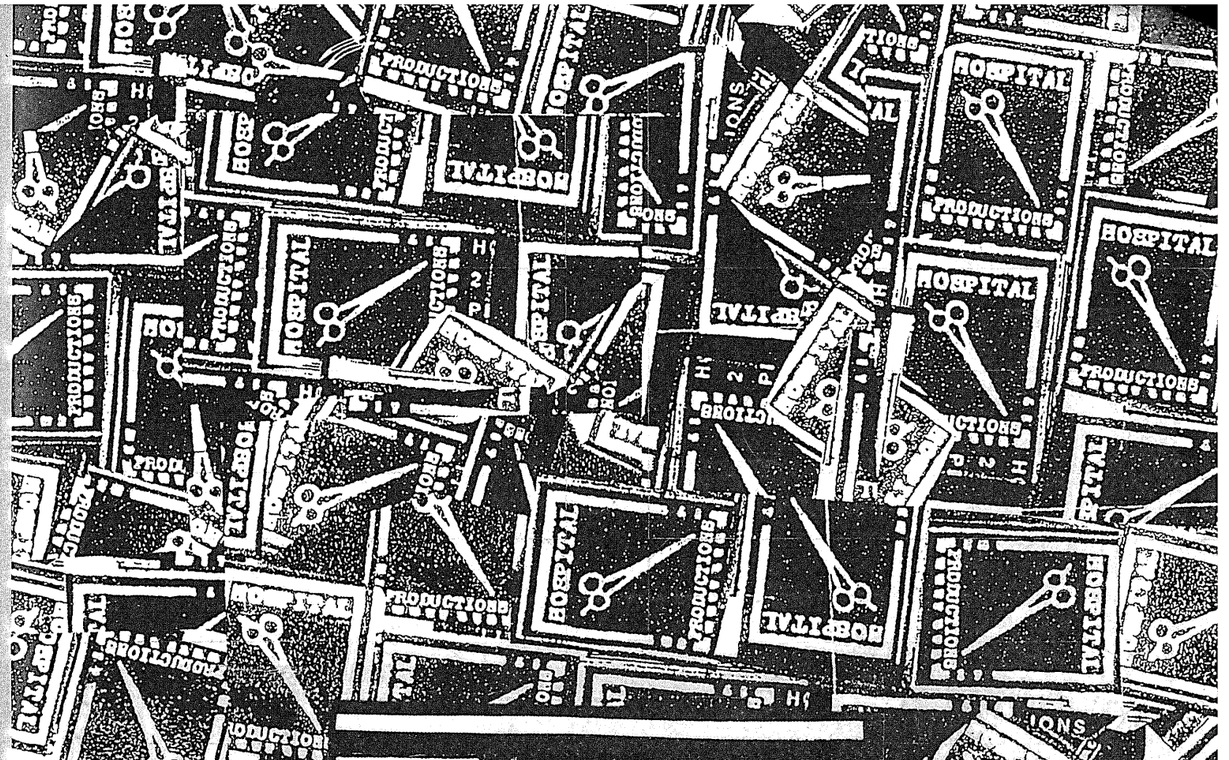
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